NEVERWINTER NIGHTS EXCLUSIVE!

▶ BioWare's New Expansion

Computer Games

The New Face of Dungeons & Dragons

The complete story on

The Temple of Elemental Evil

Plus: Gary Gygax speaks!

Million Dollar MODS

Gamers cash in with Epic's "Make Something Unreal" contest

SEPTEMBER 2003

And the latest on:

XIII, Full Spectrum Warrior, Terminator 3
WarCraft III: The Frozen Throne, Warlords IV
The Elder Scrolls: Bloodmoon, and the new Tomb Raider

#BXNMLCP********AUTO**5-DIGIT 53508
#53508KUT320WC000#   JUN 2003
JL5 70 COMG03 SEP03   277 62766
ROBERT KNUTESON
W3202 SCHAEFER RD
BELLEVILLE WI 53508-9659

A Time of Change

Ether is everywhere, it knows no boundaries. All living things come from Ether and revert back to it after death…it is the flow of life itself.

Heroes of the four races are locked in battle, but a new threat has emerged. A powerful enemy, who's intentions threaten the existence of every creature.

45 new spells

15 new creatures

All new multiplayer modes

5 campaigns with a non-linear storyline

GAMERS PRESS ON ETHERLORDS

«the most exciting turn-based strategy game on PC» Computer and Video Games

«the best game ever released in the turn-based fantasy genre» GameSpy

«Etherlords is a visual stunner with strong AI, fast moving gameplay, and a lot of depth. Definitely recommended.» PC Gamer

Etherlords 2 has evolved from a critically acclaimed strategy game into a stunning and addictive Role-Playing Game. Single player mode features a captivating storyline and multiplayer mode allows you to challenge up to 8 friends.

www.strategyfirst.com

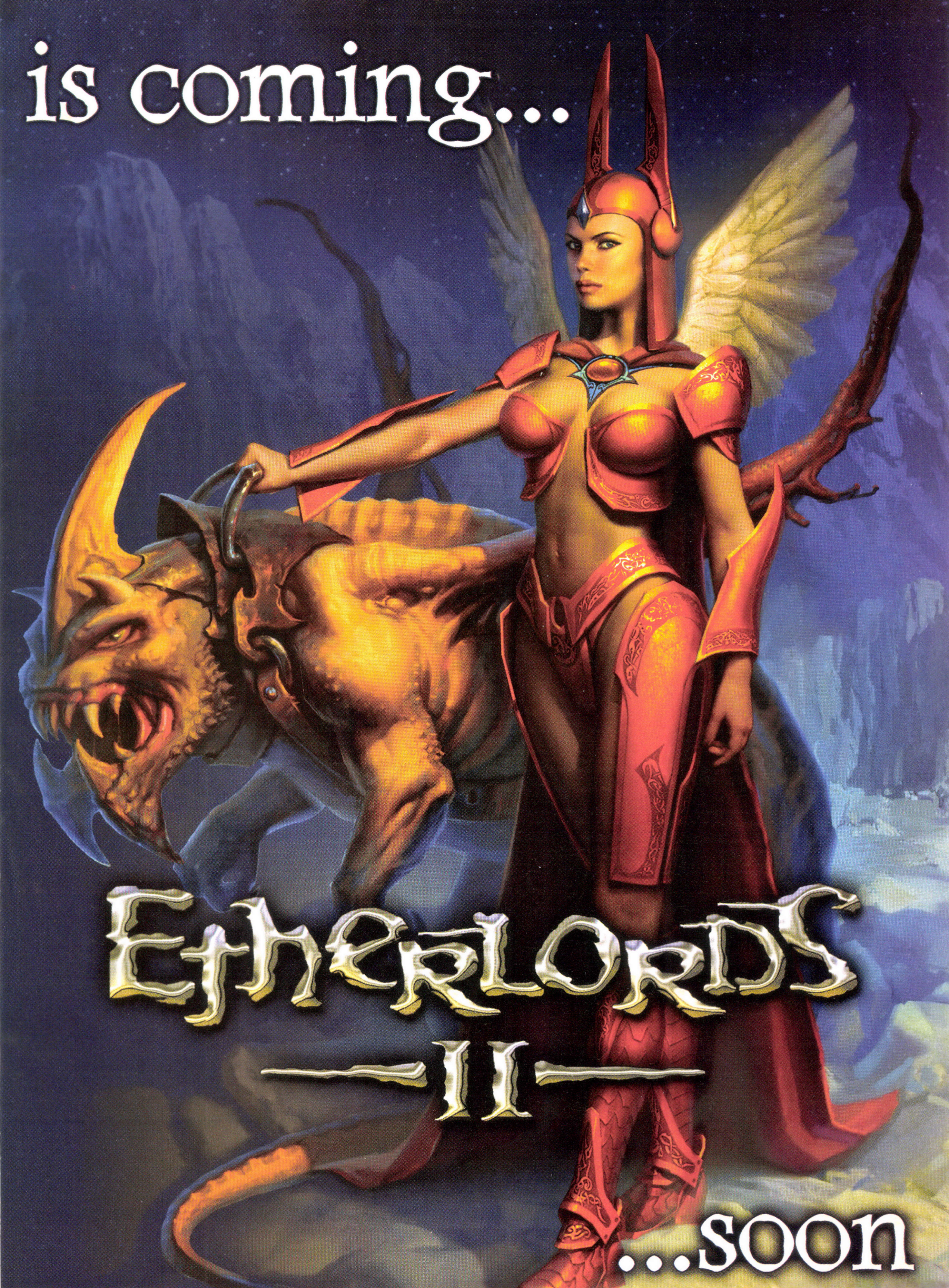
www.etherlords.com

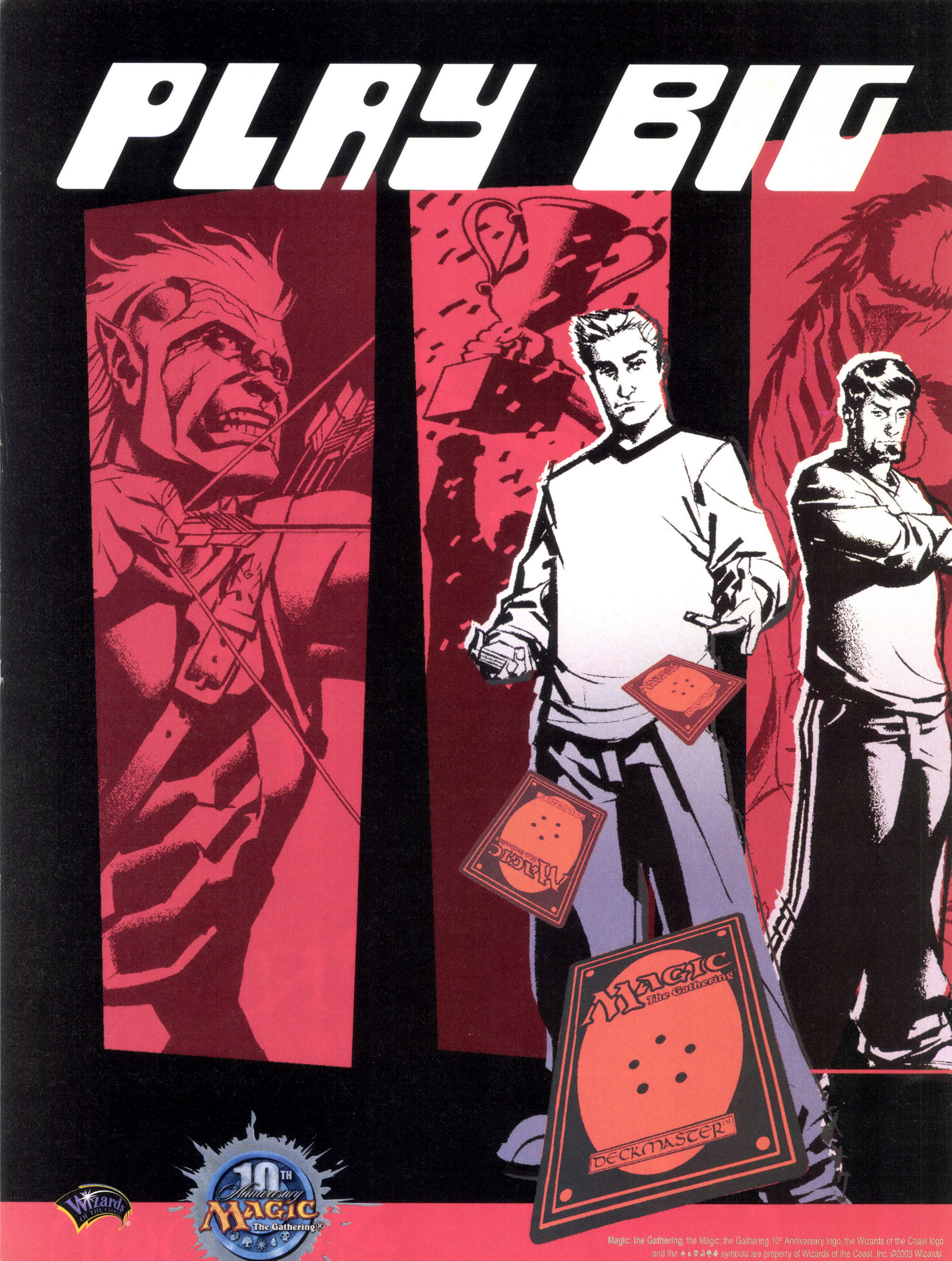
TEEN
T
Blood
Violence
ESRB CONTENT RATING www.esrb.org

© 2003 Strategy First Inc. All rights reserved. Etherlords II is a trademark of Nival Interactive. All rights reserved. All other trademarks and copyrights are the properties of their respective owners.

Strategy First

NIVAL INTERACTIVE


is coming...
Etherlords
II
...soon


PLAY BIG
MAGIC The Gathering
DECKMASTER
Wizards of the Coast
10TH Anniversary
MAGIC The Gathering®

Magic: the Gathering, the Magic: the Gathering 10th Anniversary logo, the Wizards of the Coast logo and the ✹💧☠☾♣◆ symbols are property of Wizards of the Coast, Inc. ©2003 Wizards.

In 1993 Magic: The Gathering® created the trading card game industry. Today, it's the biggest and best game of its kind.

6 million players worldwide.

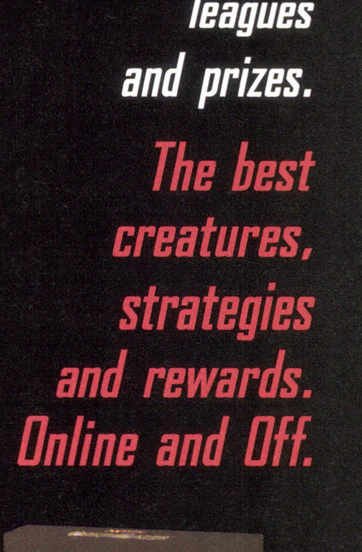
Over $3 million paid out last year alone.

Tournaments,
leagues
and prizes.

The best
creatures,
strategies
and rewards.
Online and Off.

See what playing big means.

Get hooked up at magicthegathering.com


MAGIC
The Gathering
TRADING CARD GAME
INCLUDES PREMIUM CARD
AND MAGIC ONLINE
CORE GAME
TWO-PLAYER GAME

On Sale July 28th

SAVAGE™

The Battle for Newerth

COMING SOON

100
Unlimited
250
24

Real time strategy meets first person shooter

Multiplayer mayhem with no monthly fee

Visit www.s2games.com for more information.

© 2003 S2 Games, LLC. Savage is a trademark of S2 Games, LLC. iGames is a trademark of iGames Publishing, LLC.

iGAMES PUBLISHING

S2GAMES

The way it's meant to be played nVIDIA

PC WINDOWS® 98, ME, 2000, XP, or Linux

RATING PENDING RP CONTENT RATED BY ESRB

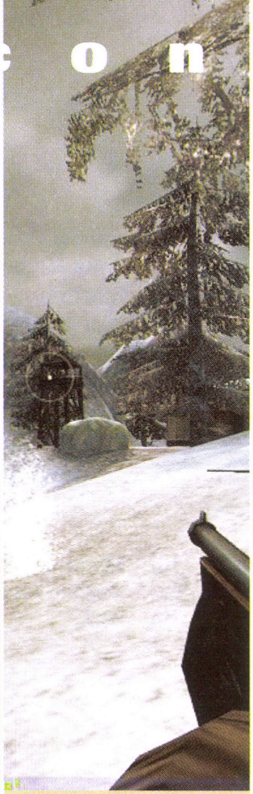
Visit www.esrb.org or call 1-800-771-3772 for more info.

contents

09.2003

54 Tomorrow's Dungeons

24 Million-Dollar Mods


32 Return (again) to...

42 In the Game 2004

68 A Swarm of Wards

cover story

54 Tomorrow's Dungeons

The *D&D* phenomenon won't end, won't break, and won't die, and we have a few reasons why, including *The Temple of Elemental Evil* and *Neverwinter Nights: Hordes of the Underdark*. We also talk to the creator of *D&D*, Gary Gygax, and ask some people from BioWare to choose their favorite characters for *Neverwinter Nights*. By Cindy Yans

featured

24 Million-Dollar Mods

Epic's "Make Something Unreal" contest is looking for the best and the brightest in the mod community. By Brett Todd

32 Return (again) to Castle Wolfenstein

Activision and Splash Damage's freebie may be the best thing to happen to shooter fans this year. By Brett Todd

42 In the Game 2004

EA Sports reveals its lineup of sports games for 2003-2004. By George Jones

68 A Swarm of Wards

With *The Frozen Throne*, *WarCraft III* continues to gleam like a jewel. By Kelly Wand

contents

departments

20 Rebound
36 Mods & Ends

incoming

43 XIII
44 Full Spectrum Warrior
46 Terminator 3: War of the Machines
50 Warlords IV

opinion

70 The Elder Scrolls: Bloodmoon
72 Neverwinter Nights: Shadows of Undrentide
74 Tomb Raider: The Angel of Darkness
75 Star Trek Elite Force II
77 Disciples II: Guardians of Light
78 Eve Online
79 WWII Frontline Command
80 Chariots of War
81 Korsun Pocket
82 Sims Superstar
82 Blitzkrieg
84 Day of Defeat
85 The Hulk
86 Purge
86 Casino, Inc.

hardware

88 Monarch Hornet
89 Klipsch Promedix GMX D-5.1
90 Q&A

insider

15 Upfront
92 Applied Game Theory
94 Road to Nowhere
96 View from the Middle
98 Out of the Box
99 Technicalities
100 Three Finger Salute

this month's demo CD

Computer Games
DEMO CD
TRON 2.0
Exclusive Single-Player Demo!
SEPTEMBER 2003
PRODUCTS RANGE FROM RATING PENDING TO TEEN
RP-T
CONTENT RATED BY ESRB
Plus Breed, Ghost Master, Galactic Civilizations and more

Modern Retro

Hey kids, remember that *TRON* movie and videogame? Maybe you do, maybe you don't, but prior knowledge isn't required to sample the thoroughly modern *TRON 2.0*, Monolith's upcoming sequel/re-imagining of the franchise. The demo is short, but at least you get to sample the lightcycles. Also this month: scare the sorority girls out of their house in a one-level demo of *Ghost Master*, take on a mission in *Breed*; and finally, play the game *Master of Orion 3* would like to be, *Galactic Civilizations*.

INSTRUCTIONS The disc should autoplay once placed in your CD-ROM. If it does not, double-click on CGCD.EXE to launch the interface. If you have a defective CD-ROM, a replacement can be obtained by sending the original to: Computer Games, ATTN: CD Replacement, 65 Millet St. Richmond, VT 05477.

Computer Games
www.cgonline.com

PUBLISHER
Edward Cespedes

BUSINESS DIRECTOR
Ed Mitchell

EDITORIAL
Editor-in-Chief
Steve Bauman
sbauman@cgonline.com

Features Editor
Cindy Yans
cyans@cgonline.com

Hardware Editor
Jason Cross
jcross@cgonline.com

Contributing Editor
Tiffany Martin

ART/PRODUCTION
Art Director
Terri Davis

Graphic Artist
Carolynne R. Wang

TECHNOLOGY
Online Director
Liz Halgas

ADVERTISING CONTACTS
Eastern & Central Sales Manager
Jeff Mather
802-767-9144 x531
jmather@cgonline.com

Western Sales Manager
Jeff Lubetkin
818-222-7516
jlubetkin@cgonline.com

CIRCULATION
Circulation Director
Alan Brush

SUBSCRIPTION SERVICES
US Subscriptions: 800-283-3542
Outside US Subscriptions: 815-734-1216
Online Subscriptions: www.cgonline.com
subscriptions@cgonline.com
PO Box 1965, Marion, OH 43306-8065

One year (12 issues) Basic Rate
US: $19.97 or $29.97 with CD
Canada: $31.97 or $41.97 with CD
Foreign: $43.97 or $53.97 with CD

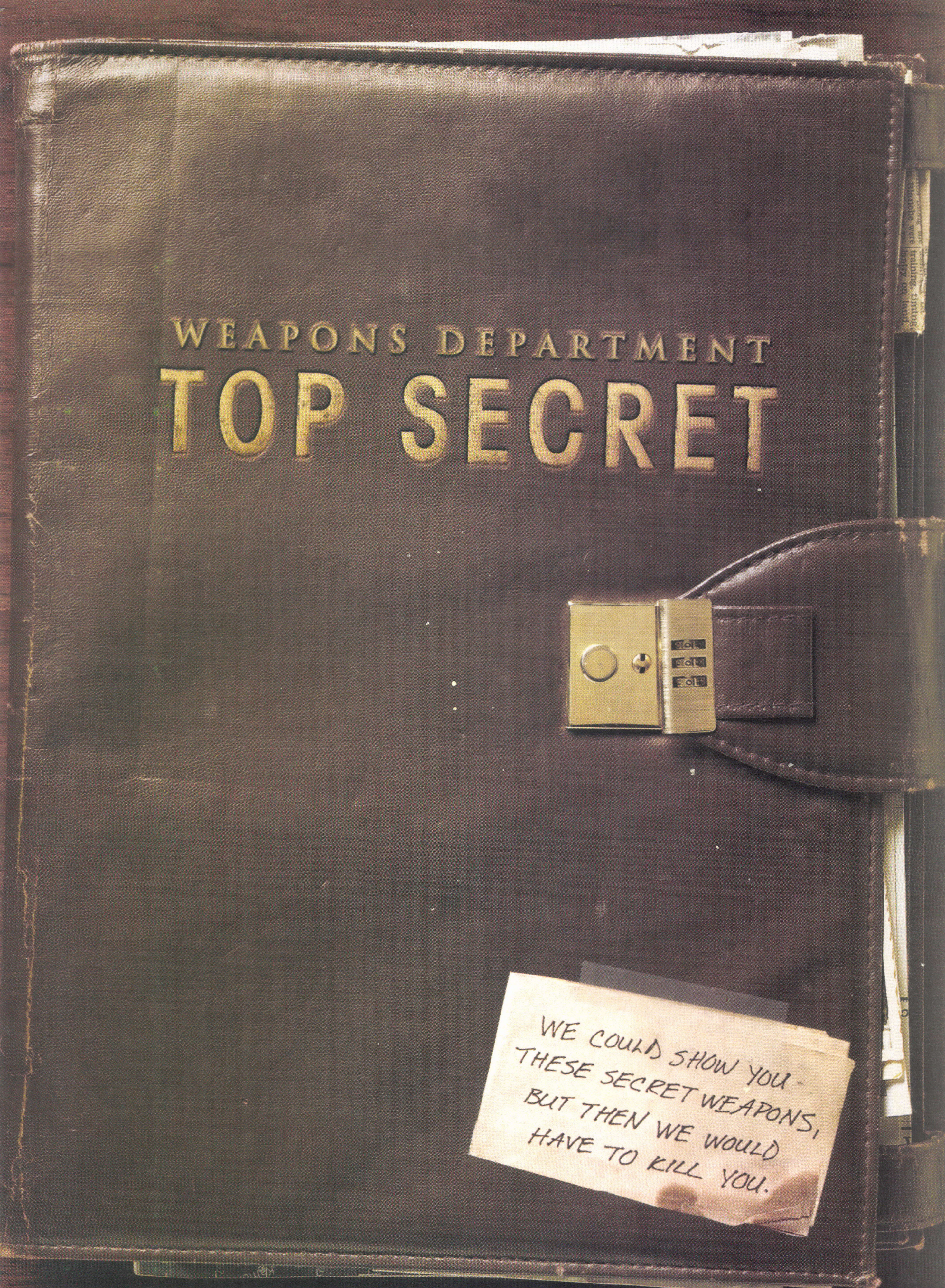
Back issues available @ 800-699-4263

Distributor: Curtis Circulation Co.
201-634-7400

Reprints available. Foreign reprint rights available.

Editorial Offices: 65 Millet Street, Suite 203
Richmond, VT 05477
802-434-3060 FAX: 802-434-6493
editor@cgonline.com

© 2003 Strategy Plus, Inc. All rights reserved. Reproduction without permission is prohibited. Unsolicited submissions become the property of Strategy Plus, Inc. If you wish to make a submission, please contact the editors.

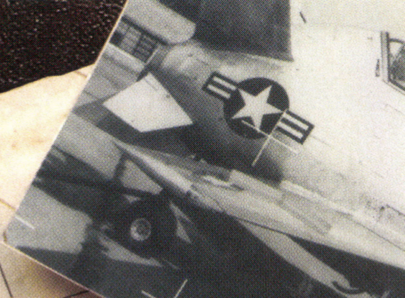

WEAPONS DEPARTMENT
TOP SECRET

WE COULD SHOW YOU
THESE SECRET WEAPONS,
BUT THEN WE WOULD
HAVE TO KILL YOU.

BATTLEFIELD™ 1942
SECRET WEAPONS OF WWII*

ATTENTION
TS = Top Secret
FF = Friendly Fire
SCD = Spawn Campers Die
CS = Crippled Soldier
NCH = Not Coming Home

1942 MAR 28 PM



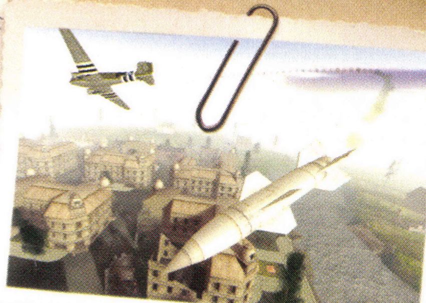
WEAPONS DEPARTMENT
OFFICIAL BUSINESS

BATTLEFIELD SECRET WEAPONS 1942

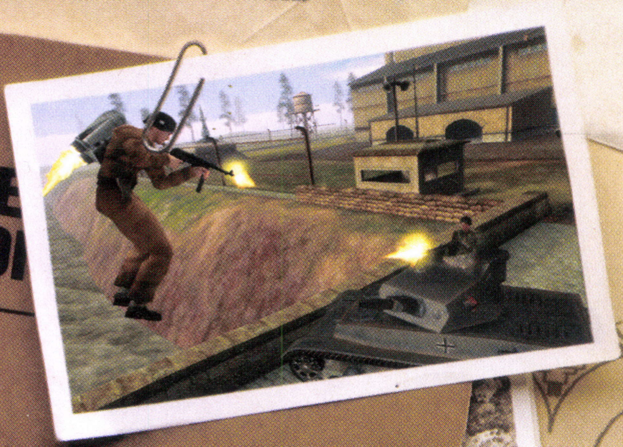
- NEW OBJECTIVE BASED GET-OUT-THERE-AND-KICK-SOME-[redacted] MODE.
- NEW SOLDIER-CLASS IDENTIFIED: BRITISH COMMANDO. GERMAN ELITE.
- 7 NEW WEAPONS. 3 FOUND: THROWABLE ONE-SHOT KILL KNIFE. SHOTGUN. GRENADE LAUNCHER
- 8 NEW BATTLEFIELDS. EAGLE'S NEST COORDINATES TO FOLLOW.
- 16 NEW [redacted], HELLRAISING VEHICLES.

THE WHITE HOUSE
OFFICIAL BUSINESS

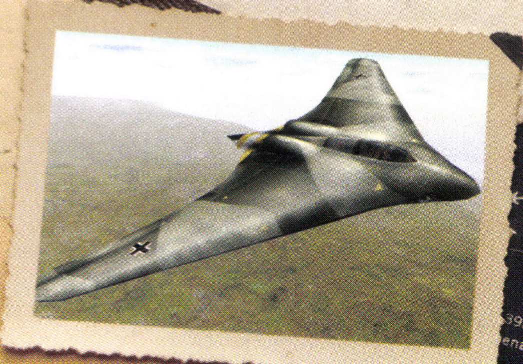
CLASSIFIED



Wasserfall rockets developed and functional [redacted] launched, flown, guided [redacted] first person. The first time you'll see it will be your last.



GERMAN PROTOTYPE ROCKET PACK [redacted] FLY AND DESTROY [redacted] [redacted] NEVER BRING A TANK TO A ROCKET PACK FIGHT.



BETTER KNOWN TO THE TEAM AS THE FLYING WING. NOW YOU SEE ME, NOW YOU DON'T KNOW WHERE THE REST OF YOUR TEAM IS.

*Battlefield 1942: Secret Weapons requires Battlefield 1942 or Battlefield 1942 Deluxe Edition to play.

©2003 Digital Illusions CE AB. All rights reserved. Battlefield 1942 is a trademark of Digital Illusions CE AB. Electronic Arts, EA GAMES, the EA GAMES logo and "Challenge Everything" are trademarks or registered trademarks of Electronic Arts Inc. in the U.S. and/or other countries. The Way It's Meant to be Played Logo and other NVIDIA Marks are trademarks of NVIDIA Corporation. GameSpy and the "Powered by GameSpy" design are trademarks of GameSpy Industries, Inc. All rights reserved. All other trademarks are the property of their respective owners. EA GAMES™ is an Electronic Arts™ brand.

RATING PENDING RP CONTENT RATED BY ESRB
Visit www.esrb.org or call 1-800-771-3772 for Rating Information.

PC CD-ROM SOFTWARE

DICE

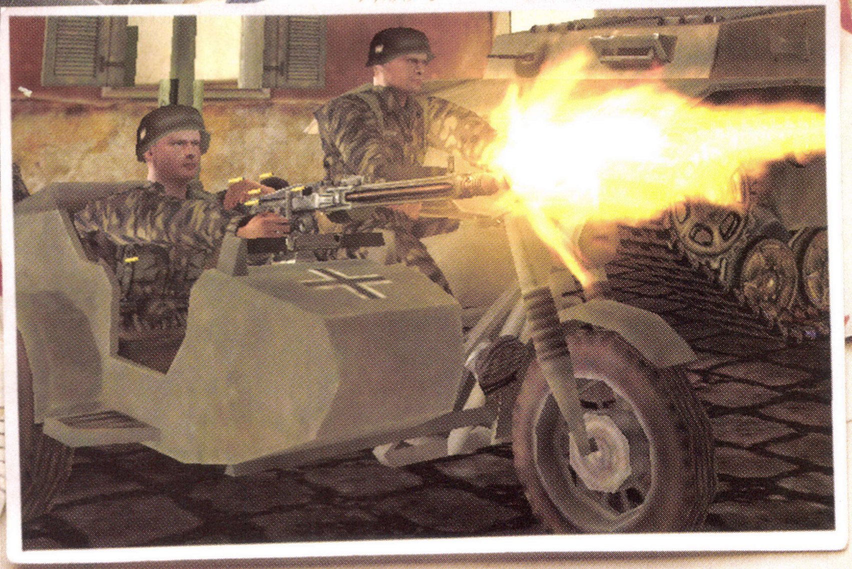
The way it's meant to be played NVIDIA

POWERED BY: gamespy

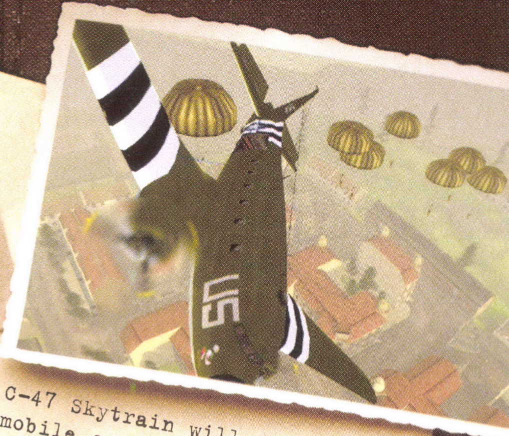
WEAPONS DEPARTMENT
OFFICIAL BUSINESS

TOP SECRET
1942

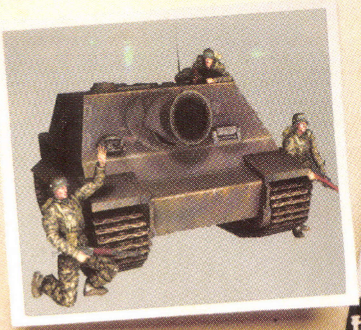
BATTLEFIELD
SECRET WEAPONS
1942



MOTORCYCLE W/ MACHINE-GUN MOUNTED SIDECAR.
LOOK STYLISH WHILE
CUTTING DOWN THE INFANTRY
AT THEIR KNEES.



C-47 Skytrain will serve as a mobile spawn point equipped with door gunner [redacted] drop in like the unexpected angel of death.



Strumtiger. Powerful naval gun mounted on tank. Design ideal for louder explosion [redacted] more casualties.

TOP SECRET

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
WASHINGTON, D. C.

December 27, 1940

SEMI-MOSAIC
RECTIFIED VERTICAL
POLYCONIC GRID
HEIGHT IN KLM

PACIFIC
THEATRE

Iwo Jima

DOWNLOAD:
SECRET WEAPONS DEMO
ADDRESS:
BATTLEFIELD1942.EA.COM

Now YOU DIE!

No.

SO SECRET, YOU DON'T KNOW THEY EXIST UNTIL YOU'RE DEAD.

$ 5.00

ISSUED TO
ISSUED BY DIG IN.
NOT TRANSFERABLE
DATE OCT 3 1942
VOID IF DETACHED

EA GAMES
CHALLENGE EVERYTHING™

ASSAULT RIFLE
875 36
VEL 67
ALT -24
FIGHTER
100 100
ROCKETS
20 1
SNIPER
182
RNG 501M

EXTINCTION IS NOT AN OPTION

IT'S A COMFORTABLE SHOOTER THAT'S EASY TO PICK UP, FEATURES SHARP GRAPHICS AND PROVIDES CHALLENGING GAMEPLAY.
- GAMESPOT

THE NEXT EVOLUTION IN GAMING, BREED IS A CUTTING-EDGE SCI-FI SHOOTER. ANNIHILATE THE ALIEN BREED AND SAVE YOUR PLANET!

- PUT YOUR HUGE ARSENAL OF WEAPONRY AND VEHICLES TO USE, INCLUDING FIGHTER JETS, TANKS, BUGGIES, LANDING CRAFT AND MORE
- BATTLE ACROSS SPACE, THROUGH THE ATMOSPHERE AND DIRECTLY ON EARTH WITH A SEAMLESS TERRAIN-TO-ORBIT TRANSITION IN18 NERVE WRECKING MISSIONS

B.R.E.E.D

WWW.BREEDGAME.COM

POWERED BY gamespy

The way it's meant to be played NVIDIA.

Brat designs

cdv

RATING PENDING
RP
CONTENT RATED BY ESRB

Visit www.esrb.org or call 1-800-771-3772 for Rating Information.

© 2003 CDV Software Entertainment AG.

GameSpy and the "Powered by Gamespy" design are trademarks of GameSpy Industries, Inc. All rights reserved

Share and Share Alike

by steve bauman

Before P2P explodes in everyone's face, I want my Gamester!

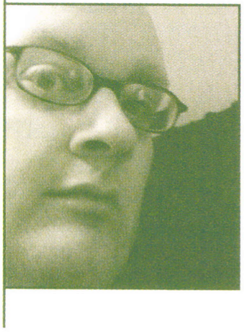
A FEW YEARS ago, I wrote a column proposing an industry standard P2P download system—dubbed not so creatively as "Gamester"—for the distribution of demos, patches, mods, in-game movies, or whatever the industry deems "game-y." As fewer and fewer companies are willing to host files due to the costs involved, it's an issue that refuses to go away. (For gamers, the only alternatives are hoping to find it somewhere for free, or paying extra for an online site or magazine cover disk.)

One other alternative is using any one of the various P2P file sharing utilities: *KaZaA*, *eDonkey*, *Bearshare*, *LimeWire*, *BitTorrent*, or my personal favorite, "IPInfringerXtremE." Why just today, I can fire up *KaZaA* (*Lite*… oops, did I type that?) and download a shaky-cam version of *The Matrix Reloaded*, which may or may not actually be *The Matrix Reloaded*. It may turn out to be, for example, *Ice Age* and/or *Fight Club* and/or badly dubbed German porn. Not that I have firsthand knowledge of any of this, mind you.

There are plenty of risks involved with using these services, from mislabeled and incomplete files to viruses. These problems illustrate the need for some sort of standardized, industry-wide effort. A company like Sharman Networks, which owns and operates *KaZaA*, is always looking to legitimize its business, at least in the eyes of companies that create copyrighted material. Sharman would be smart to partner with the industry.

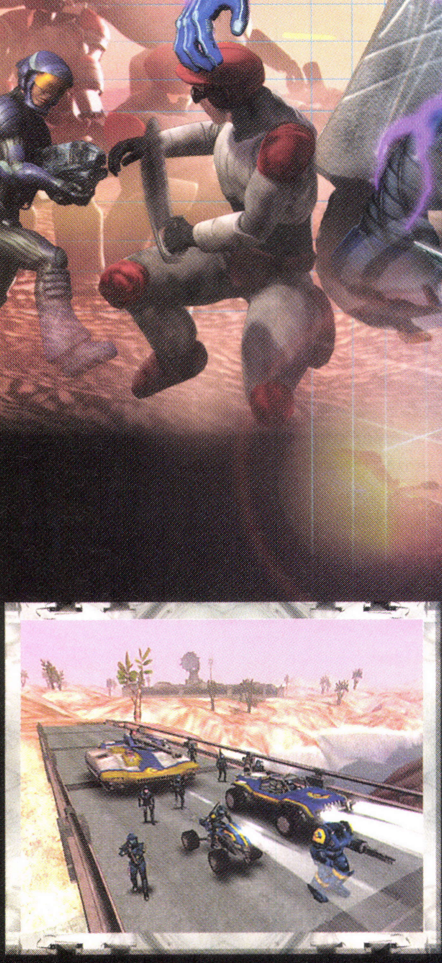
When I've spoken to people at various game companies about this topic, they have the same answer: as long as copyright materials appear on these networks, they have no interest in legitimizing them with any support. In other words, game companies are as likely to partner with an "open" system like *KaZaA* as are the MPAA and RIAA, the watchdog organizations for the movie and music industry, respectively. (Example article on www.mpaa.org: "Copyright: The Engine of America's Economic Growth.")

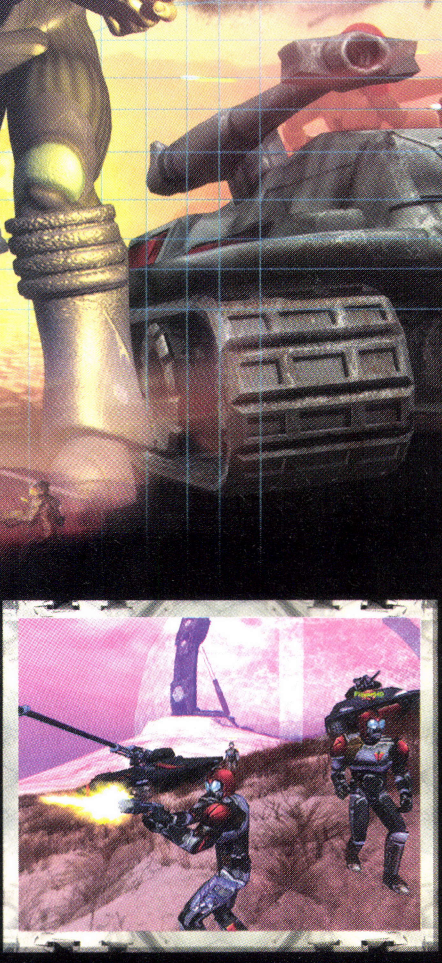
Most people downloading games, music, or movies rationalize their behavior by using the tried-and-true "too expensive" or "poor quality" arguments. The former has never held up under close scrutiny—regardless of price, $0 will always win over $10, $20, or $49.99—but the "poor quality" argument is interesting. You can find plenty of demos and patches on these services, and based entirely on anecdotal evidence from the five people I know, plenty of people use the download services to, shock of all shocks, "demo" full versions of games. These people are essentially saying that demos aren't enough. They need to play through the entire game—or at least a significant portion—to decide if it's worth buying. This begs the question "Why would you buy something when you already have the full version sitting on your machine?"



With entertainment companies acting all scared and paranoid, the future of entertainment is looking mighty bleak. "Digital Rights Management," which is a catch-all term for a number of technologies designed to lock specific media to your PC or various devices, is a disaster waiting to happen. Current forms of copy protection are uniformly terrible and obtrusive, and we're seeing more online PC games in part because they can't be pirated. There's little question media and entertainment companies overstate the effects of piracy, but to say it has no effect is naive. With the MPAA and RIAA getting even tougher on P2P networks by targeting individual users instead of the software itself—a decision made not by choice but by necessity after a number of court losses—it's getting less and less likely we'll see any reasonable solution. Apple's initial success with the music download service iTunes notwithstanding, it may be dumb of these companies not to take advantage of the Internet, but users have brought this fate upon themselves. If the IDSA, the game industry equivalent to the MPAA and RIAA, decides to go after its own users, watch out. I still want my Gamester, but the entire concept of legitimate P2P may be dead-in-the-water before it has a chance to sink or swim on its own merits. G

> *"…people are essentially saying that demos aren't enough. They need to play through the entire game—or at least a significant portion—to decide if it's worth buying."*





PlanetSide™

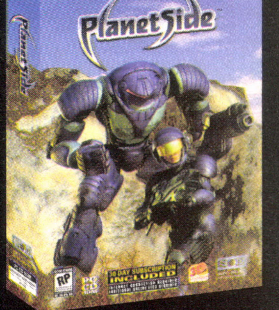
THE BATTLES HAVE JUST BEGUN.™

Enlist at www.planetside.com

FOR LAND.
FOR POWER.
FOREVER.™

Enlist today! Align with the Vanu Sovereignty, Terran Republic or New Conglomerate and wage war with thousands of players in the first ever massively multiplayer online first-person battle! Join squads, command troops and pilot air, hover or land vehicles in your pursuit of total domination.

Which side are you on?



SOE®
SONY ONLINE ENTERTAINMENT

The way it's nVIDIA meant to be played™

3D ACCELERATOR REQUIRED

PC CD ROM

TEEN® T CONTENT RATED BY ESRB

Violence

Game Experience May Change During Online Play.

© 2003 Sony Online Entertainment Inc. PlanetSide, the slogan For Land. For Power. Forever., and all other PlanetSide slogans and placenames are trademarks of Sony Online Entertainment Inc. SOE and the SOE logo are registered trademarks of Sony Online Entertainment Inc. The Way It's Meant To Be Played logo is a trademark of NVIDIA Corporation. The ratings icon is a registered trademark of the Interactive Digital Software Association. All rights reserved. All other trademarks or tradenames are properties of their respective owners.

Blood Mage - The Blood Mage is quick to take vengeance upon any who threaten his brethren.

TEEN
T
CONTENT RATED BY
ESRB
Blood
Violence

© 2003 Blizzard Entertainment. All rights reserved. The Frozen Throne is a trademark and Blizzard Entertainment and Warcraft are trademarks or registered trademarks of Blizzard Entertainment in the U.S. and/or other countries.

Crypt Lord - The ancient spider kings rise again to defend the Scourge.

8 New Units

9 New Heroes

26 New Missions

◆

Infinite Strategy

WARCRAFT III
THE FROZEN THRONE™
EXPANSION SET

IN STORES NOW

BLIZZARD ENTERTAINMENT
blizzard.com

What is sexy and what is sexist? What is gratuitous and what is realistic? What is "adult" and what is "juvenile?" Those questions seem to be on the minds of readers. Because of our stated goal of being more "mature"—or more accurately, perhaps, less immature—than other publications, we're being taken to task for every single joke or perceived digression from that mission. For example, reader Joe Dominges checked out the July cover and said: "There was a girl with big breasts and tight clothes on the magazine." In addition to making a similar comment about that cover, Igor Obraztsov accused us of writing the letters praising that goal in recent Rebounds. "For the third straight month, your Rebound has been no more than a spew of glowing praise for your magazine," he wrote. "You may now delete this message and get back to writing self-praise for your next Rebound." Now that hurts. We don't actually write any of the letters, but we'll try our best to do really annoying things that generate tons of hate mail in the near future. Keep it coming to *rebound@cgonline.com*

NVIDIA STRIKES BACK!
GeF
FX 5
FIRST
Computer Games
JULY 2003
FIRST LOOK!
Tribes
The Return of
New developer. New focus.
STRATEGY GAMES EXPOSED
Lord of the Rings & EverQuest
24 Tough Reviews
THE LATEST BUZZ
19 Detailed Previews
New Shots: World of WarCraft
WHY YOU'RE NOT PLAYING
TRON 2.0

Tribes Vengeance

The obvious thing missing from *Tribes* is not a single-player game. It does not need to "go" somewhere it hasn't or push any envelope.

I'm just one of many hardcore fans who know what a precarious task it is to balance the gameplay of this great title. *Tribes 2* had a host of its own problems in comparison to the original, but it managed, in a broad sense, to keep the same feel. There is an understated feel to both *Tribes* games that allows the individual player to "fill in the story" of these strange worlds they battle on. We don't need to be spoon-fed someone else's perceptions.

Tribes is, and always will be, a multiplayer experience. It is about testing your skill and resourcefulness against others. Teamwork, or the anticipation of teamwork, combined with victories large and small can never be equaled in a single-player game.

Michael Johnson's suggestions for the multiplayer support does not appear to offer mapmakers anything they don't currently possess, but seeks to regulate and redefine what a map "should be," all the while being couched under the guise of "lots of potential." The suggested streamlining is nothing more than nitpicking. Command map and sensor systems are not a problem and most players give it little if any thought. "Streamlining" armor and weapons loadouts is really just fiddling.

Ben Lee and Ken Levine's insights into enhancing *Tribes* aesthetically are nothing short of trite. The best designers are those who show restraint and pay close attention to the subtleties. Their suggestions for "big exhaust ports, big blasting rockets, huge noise, and big control surfaces" underscore their propensity to indulge themselves in their own personal fetishes without regard for the history and continuity of the game.

So why are Vivendi Universal and Irrational so anxious to take *Tribes* in a "new direction?" Because it has an existing fan base to pander to and it's easier and financially safer than producing their own mediocre run-and-gun shooter, which is the best their game will ever be.

John Howerton

Virtual Dollars, Real Economics

I have a few comments with regard to the article "Virtual Dollars, Real Economics" in the July issue. The first point is simply about the profitability of selling characters and equipment. The quoted amount of $12,000 a year, playing 80 hours a week, just is not a sensible return on investment. I'll grant that a high school kid may see this as a nice deal, but for anyone else, how do you really expect to survive on that little money?

More significantly, I find the discussion of "legal rights of subscribers" terribly flawed. These are games, sold as such, with plenty of things you have to agree to beforehand, acknowledging that the companies can turn off the servers pretty much whenever they feel like it. Since an extremely small percentage of the playing population, let alone the real world one, would see the games as anything but games, you'd have a hard time convincing a judge of any special "rights."

But what if game property was granted some legal status? That would grant my persona a legal status. Now, when you flame me in the game world, are you guilty of slander? Or if you abuse a character, is it assault? It seems ridiculous, but if you want one right, you risk other responsibilities, and we all know how so many on the Internet want no accountability for their actions.

So, Mr. Castronova, and others eyeing a lawsuit against Sony *et al*, think before you go down some ridiculous and booby-trapped path.

Steve Fischer

Rise of Nations

Tom Chick did a pretty good job catching the flavor of the game. He also mentioned some of the remnant flaws of past real-time strategy games, and whether *Rise of Nations* did or did not fix them. One thing that Big Huge Games could have done to fix a major glitch in most, if not all of these games, is answer the question: "What beats what?" I've noticed problems in several areas. The first was when one enemy *M*A*S*H* style helicopter wiped out five of my M1 tanks. I don't think that medevac helos from the Korean War era were adept at tank hunting, much less destruction of five modern M1 Main Battle Tanks. That got me curious. So I started a new game and tweaked the setting so I could advance at a fast rate. I was never more than two levels ahead of an enemy, and I found many impossibilities. One instance was when a steel-hulled battleship was sunk by two wood-hull frigates shooting arrows.

Are you ready to
have a threesome in
the back of a cab?

NOKIA
N·GAGE
N·GAGE

Approximate size

Are you ready to N-Gage™?

Preorder the revolution in wireless multiplayer gameplay in-store or online.

In-game 3D graphics • Game card titles from top publishers
Bluetooth technology • MP3 player • Built-in phone

N·GAGE
NOKIA

Preorder at select stores or online

GameStop EBGAMES n-gage.com/preorder

Multiplayer network gameplay and data transmission speeds dependent upon operator network capabilities and other conditions. Copyright (c) 2003 Nokia. All rights reserved. Nokia and N-Gage are trademarks or registered trademarks of Nokia Corporation. Bluetooth is a registered trademark of Bluetooth SIG, Inc. The Nokia N-Gage mobile game deck supports Bluetooth Specification 1.1 {"Handsfree Audio" and "Object Push Data"} profiles. Contact the manufacturer of each Bluetooth device for information on compatibility. Other company names mentioned herein may be trademarks or trade names of their respective owners.

This has been a problem in most RTS games I have played. I was hoping with *Rise of Nations*, there would have been a fix, but I guess I was assuming... and you know what that leads to.

On the positive side, this game has the best graphics of any RTS I've played. Zoom in and watch a cannon actually being loaded before it's fired, for example. There are dozens of animations for each character. That in and of itself makes it one of the best RTS games I've played.

Patrick McNelis

[Insert discussion about spearmen destroying tanks in Civilization.*] —ed*

View from the Middle

Bravo to Ken Levine for taking a stand against the proliferation of all the self-indulgent proper nouns! I can't tell you how many times I've cringed at all the superfluous names. Argh! Who cares? Certainly no one in the foreplay of reading the manual.

Sure, they can make up all the names they want while they're developing, but dumping it in the lap of their audience is another thing altogether. It's tantamount to being unable to have a thought that you don't also speak.

And for heaven's sake, stop using multiple vowels when one will suffice—I'm looking at you Skaarj—and avoid abominations such as using apostrophes in the names. The presumption that their new property has any such cache with their audience, the presumption that we actually care that much, is high and thoughtless hubris.

Jin Choung

Technicalities

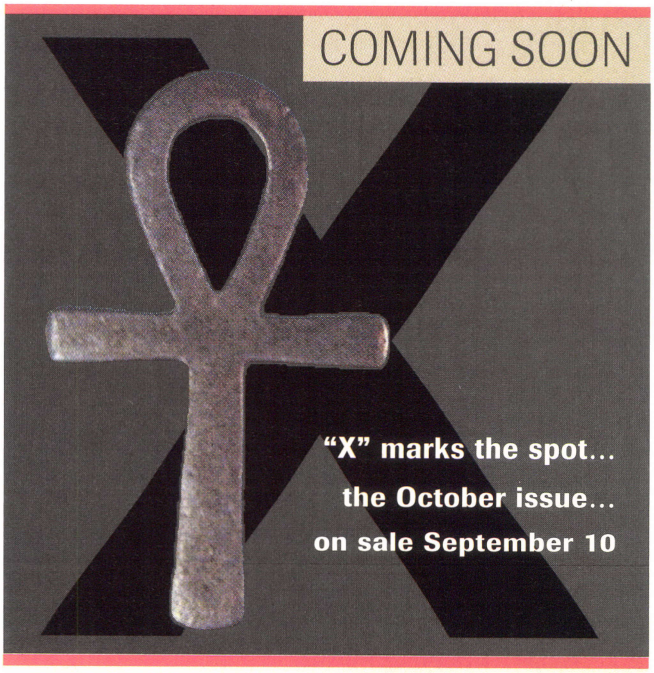
After reading the article about EA Games and NVIDIA in the July issue, I'm going to try not to get incensed. I have been a big fan of NVIDIA and have admired its terrific support and drivers. As my GeForce3 Ti200 started getting longer and longer in the tooth, I waited patiently for the company to come up with its next "best thing." After the Futuremark driver debacle and the fact that the next "best thing" still isn't here, I reluctantly bought an ATI Radeon 9500 Pro. It seems its driver problems are behind it now, and it does a great job for me. But should I ever find an EA game that only plays its best on an NVIDIA card, I will not buy it. If I have purchased it and found this to be true, I will return it. Matter of fact, if I find that EA is producing games that work this way, I will not buy any of its products.

I am retired; I game a lot. I will dispose of my income in the manner I see fit, and will not be manipulated in this shoddy manner. Is it just me, or does it seem that NVIDIA is running a little scared to be doing this?

Chip Arnberg

ERRATA

July's preview of *Call of Duty* said the game "...features many of the animation, scripting, and AI enhancements brought over from *Return to Castle Wolfenstein*." According to Activision and developer Infinity Ward, this is incorrect. The team did start with the *Wolfenstein* codebase but has written new terrain, AI, scripting, and animation systems, plus a new hardware T&L renderer and lighting tool. We regret the error.


COMING SOON
"X" marks the spot...
the October issue...
on sale September 10

speak out! **Have something to say? So say it! We're adding a new column where readers speak out on whatever gaming topic they see fit. Send all submissions with topics and/or completed articles (which should be no more than 750 words) to editor@cgonline.com.**

Visit our online forums at *forums.cgonline.com*

Participate in this month's survey at *www.cgonline.com*

ADVERTISERS	PAGE NO
ABS Computer [www.abscomputer.com]	51
Activision [www.activision.com]	Back Cover, 59, 61, 63, 65
Blizzard [www.blizzard.com]	18-19
Buenva Vista Games [www.buenavistagames.com]	31, 33, 35, 37
CDV [www.cdv.de]	14, 91
Chips & Bits [www.chipsbits.com]	95
Earthlink [www.earthlink.net]	97
Electronic Arts [www.eagames.com]	11-13, 38-39
iGames [www.igames.com]	8
Microsoft [www.microsoft.com]	47
Monarch Computer [www.monarchcomputer.com]	Inside Back Cover
newegg.com [www.newegg.com]	29
Nokia [www.nokia.com]	21
Sony Online [station.sony.com]	16-17, 53
Strategy First [www.strategyfirst.com]	4-5, 93
Summitsoft [www.summitsoft.com]	45
Vivendi Universal [www.vugames.com]	23, 27, 40-41, 48-49
Wizards of the Coast [www.wizards.com]	6-7
Worldsims [www.worldsims.com]	67

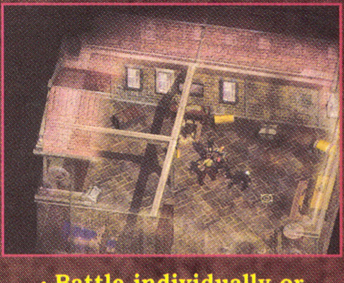
YOUR ANCESTRY HAS MADE YOU A WARRIOR. YOUR FATE WILL MAKE YOU A CHAMPION.

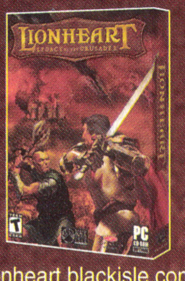
Somewhere between fantasy and history, your epic crusade begins in a medieval world ravaged by sinister spirits and demonic magic. As a descendant of King Richard the Lionhearted, it will take all of your wit, wisdom and will to save the fate of humankind.

LIONHEART
LEGACY OF THE CRUSADER™

• Create characters from four unique races.

• Master over 60 spells and thousands of weapons.


• Battle individually or in teams.



lionheart.blackisle.com

TEEN
BLOOD
SUGGESTIVE THEMES
USE OF ALCOHOL
VIOLENCE
CONTENT RATED BY ESRB

VIVENDI UNIVERSAL games · PC CD-ROM SOFTWARE · BLACK ISLE studios · POWERED BY gamespy · Interplay BY GAMERS. FOR GAMERS.™ · Reflexive entertainment inc.

LIONHEART: Legacy of the Crusader © 2003 Interplay Entertainment Corp. All Rights Reserved. Reflexive Velocity Engine © 2003 Reflexive Entertainment, Inc. All Rights Reserved. Interplay, the Interplay logo, Black Isle Studios, the Black Isle Studios Logo, Lionheart: Legacy of the Crusader, and the Lionheart: Legacy of the Crusader logo are trademarks of Interplay Entertainment Corp. Reflexive and the Reflexive logo are trademarks of Reflexive Entertainment, Inc. The Vivendi Universal Games Logo is a trademark of Vivendi Universal Games, Inc. GameSpy and the "Powered by GameSpy" design are trademarks of GameSpy Industries, Inc. All rights reserved. All other trademarks and copyrights are the property of their respective owners.

THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA
1,000,000
ONE MILLION DOLLARS
THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA
1,000,000
ONE MILLION DOLLARS

Million-Dollar Mods

Epic's Make Something Unreal Contest is looking for the best and the brightest in the mod community

BY BRETT TODD

"ONE MEEEELLLLION DOLLARS." Maybe that's not a lot of money if you're Dr. Evil threatening the globe with a death ray, but it's a fair chunk of change to a pizza-fuelled mod community that does what it does purely out of love for games. Financial compensation for all those long hours polishing textures and stomping bugs is finally in the offing, however, courtesy of the "$1,000,000 Make Something Unreal Contest." The year-long competition is co-sponsored by NVIDIA, *Unreal* developer Epic Games, series publisher Atari, and partners AMD, Alias/Waterfront, and Digital Extremes as a way of both rewarding modders and providing talented programmers with a leg up to making games full-time.

Epic vice-president Mark Rein has his hopes suitably high, as the contest was launched with splashy press coverage that included articles in *USA Today* and *The Hollywood Reporter*. It's also received major coverage in the slightly less mainstream mod community, where both longtime *Unreal* modders and game-biz newbies looking for a platform on which to show their stuff are plainly excited about the opportunities afforded by such a high-profile event.

"There are lots of possibilities for the really talented people who enter this contest, whether it be by getting noticed and hired in the industry, or possibly by striking out on their own to get their mod published as a full game," says Rein. "This contest is very much about opportunities for people to find work in the game business whether they've built games before or not. We've been trying to attract not just existing mod-makers, but also those people with the kinds of skills desired in the game business. For example, those guys in Hollywood who make special effects and dream of directing their own efforts would do well to visit the 'Mastering Unreal' web site (www.masteringunreal.com) and check out the over 120 hours of free downloadable video training modules that teach how to use our tools and get content into our game and engine. We want to encourage everyone to try their hand at this."

To help include everyone, the contest sponsors have drawn up a wide range of categories, and posted staggered deadlines that extend to March 15, 2004. All of the top categories are awarded cash prizes more than once on an escalating scale, giving modders the impetus to submit their creations for judgement numerous times over the length of the contest. For example, on July 15th, the year's best mod was awarded $7,500. On October 20th, there will be two classes, FPS and non-FPS, with the same amount awarded to each. On February 15, 2004, the prize jumps up to $15,000.

Rein notes that modders aren't required to enter their work multiple times, so people can feel free to hold back if they're not ready to unveil their creations to the judges. At the same time, he also stresses that the staggered deadlines were put in place "To encourage people to put their mods out multiple times, listen to the feedback from the public (and the judges if they make the top five), and then improve them for entry in subsequent phases. Game development is about setting mile-

ITED STATES OF AMERICA
1,000,000
MILLION DOLLARS

stones and making iterative improvements to your game over time. We wanted people to get a feel for those processes."

These processes will also be illuminated by over two dozen categories that encompass every aspect of *Unreal* modding. The FPS and non-FPS divisions will probably attract the most attention, both from modders and industry people looking to recruit new talent. But nobody should overlook the other awards, as they address both traditional and more esoteric modding skills. Alongside the expected awards for level and model are unexpected categories for vehicle, use of 3D sound, and even non-interactive movie.

Most categories offer cash prizes for first- through fifth-place finishes. There will be no million-dollar prize (the attention-grabbing title refers to the total amount of prize money), although the grand finalist mod-maker will take home $150,000, and the grand finalist non-interactive movie-maker will cash a $50,000 check. Even the smallest awards will be worth a respectable $250, which will buy a lot of Cheetos for those late-night modding binges. Schools will be rewarded in the end as well, with 50 computer systems going to the educational institutions best represented by students or faculty taking part in the contest.

For a full list of categories, prizes, and submission deadlines, check out: www.unrealtournament2003.com/?contest.

Free to Play

Court says games are protected speech

LAST YEAR, a federal judge in Missouri declared that video games, unlike movies, books, and music, were not protected by the First Amendment [See CGM 142]. This year, a federal court of appeals told Judge Limbaugh he was wrong. In a unanimous decision by the three-judge panel of the 8th Circuit Court of Appeals, the level of court just below the Supreme Court, Judge Limbaugh's earlier ruling was reversed. In doing so, the court struck down a St. Louis ordinance that would have banned the sale or rental of violent video games to minors without parental consent.

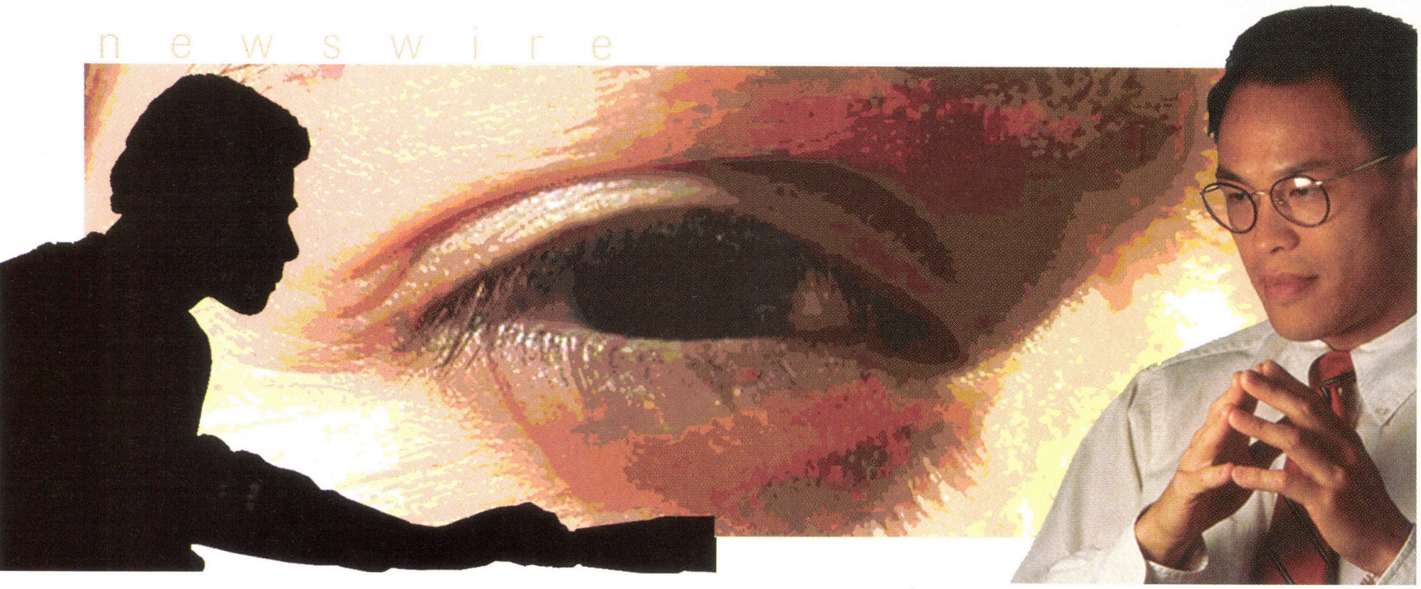
This appellate opinion marks the most definitive statement yet that video games constitute protected speech, and that children have constitutionally protected rights to access that speech. In order for something to be considered "speech," in a First Amendment sense, it must convey some meaningful expression or information. Judge Limbaugh wrote that video games did not, that they were more like a game of checkers than a movie. The appellate court disagreed.

According to the new decision, "If the First Amendment is versatile enough to 'shield [the] painting of Jackson Pollack, the music of Arnold Schoenberg, or Jabberwocky verse of Lewis Carroll,' we see no reason why the pictures, graphic design, concept art, sound, music, stories, and narratives present in video games are not entitled to similar protection." The court went on to add, "Indeed, we find it telling that the County seeks to restrict access to these video games precisely because their content purportedly affects the thought or behavior of those who play them."

Although the decision is technically only binding in certain states within the 8th Circuit, it's likely to carry considerable persuasive power around the country. And free speech advocates will need it. Laws similar to the now overturned St. Louis ordinance are floating around the legislatures of almost every state in the country.

—Robert de los Reyes, Esq.

REVERSED
make no law respecting an establis
prohibiting the free exercise
speech, or of the press
of the people peaceably to assemble
petition the government for a redress of griev



Better Sight

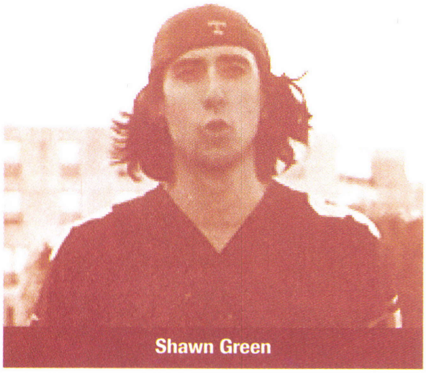
Study shows action games improve visual skills

AS AN UNDERGRADUATE at the University of Rochester, Shawn Green worked in the laboratory of Dr. Daphne Bavelier. Dr. Bavelier's research concentrated on the differences between the visual perception of the congenitally deaf and people with hearing. While previous research demonstrated that deaf subjects had better peripheral perception and noticed abruptly appearing objects more quickly than hearing people, when Green took the same tests, he dramatically outperformed both groups. In fact, he demonstrated greater visual acuity than had been shown in other published research. Wondering if he had set up the test incorrectly, he tried the test with some of his friends and noticed that while non-gamers performed as expected, gamers demonstrated significantly greater visual abilities.

To demonstrate that gamers' visual skills differ from non-gamers, the lab subjected two groups to a battery of visual tests. One was composed of eight men, aged 18-23, who played action titles at least one hour per day, four days a week, for six months. These people played games like *Counter-Strike*, *Super Mario Kart,* and *Grand Theft Auto III.* The other group was made up of eight non-gamers. The tests indicated that gamers could keep track of more objects, despite distractions, in a larger space over a longer time than non-gamers.

Having demonstrated gamers' superior visual skills, they had to show that gaming trained visual perception, the alternative being that only visually gifted individuals play games. To demonstrate this, they took non-gamers and forced them to play. One group of nine had to play *Medal of Honor: Allied Assault* for an hour a day for ten consecutive days. The other group played *Tetris* for the same time. They hypothesized that the group learning *Medal of Honor* would show improved visual abilities because of the many objects in a wide field that must be tracked simultaneously. *Tetris* players (with the preview pane off) only had to track one falling block, and thus should show little or no improvement. Both groups got better at their respective games, but the *Medal of Honor* players showed much improvement, and demonstrated the ability to track more objects with a larger usable field of view. The researchers even demonstrated that improvement in play, as measured by accuracy and deaths/mission completions, somewhat correlated with improved visual acuity.

Not only did they demonstrate that computer gamers are better at some visual tasks, but that a short training period on an action title can improve visual skills. These tests don't show improved intellectual capacity, but are evidence of talents that could be useful for tasks such as driving and air-traffic control. The study has come under fire for promoting violent video games, which it does not, but the scientists plan to use non-violent games such as racing titles in the future to demonstrate that visual acuity has nothing to do with pixilated blood or killing Nazis. —*Kyle Ackerman*



Shawn Green

spotlight

From the Dark Side

Following not quite on the heels of the Hero action figures from Blizzard's *WarCraft III* comes this set of three of the game's more notorious personalities. The set includes Prince Arthas, Death Knight, once prince of Lordaeron, but now bound to the Lich King's evil will; Shandras Feathermoon, Night Elf Archer, expert markswoman in the forests of Kalimdor; and Tichondrius, Dread Lord, a demon serving as Kil'jaeden the Deceiver's elite guard. The realistically sculpted figures are each about seven inches tall, with 14-16 points of articulation. They retail for approximately $10 each, and $35 for the set.

ALL LURK AND NO PLAY!
Ghost Master®
EXERCISE YOUR DEMONS
TEEN
T
CONTENT RATED BY
ESRB
Blood
Mild Violence
PC
CD-ROM
SOFTWARE
EMPIRE

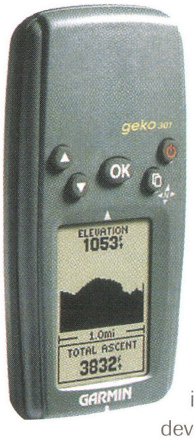
There's never a dull day in Gravenville. As Ghost Master you'll command a mischievous horde of 47 different gremlins, phantoms and wraiths to stalk the sisters of the sorority house or torment the town's other citizens in 14 graphically intense scenarios based on classic movies. Rattle some chains. Lurk about. You'll be hooked in no time.

www.GhostMasterGame.com

Ghost Master ©2003 Empire Interactive Europe Ltd. Developed by Sick Puppies, a studio of Empire Interactive Europe Ltd. Ghost Master, Empire and "(E logo outline graphic)" are trademarks or registered trademarks of Empire Interactive Europe Ltd. in the UK, Europe and/or other countries. All other trademarks and copyrights are property of their respective owners. All rights reserved.

Get Going

Garmin's Gekos give gamer gearheads a reason to go



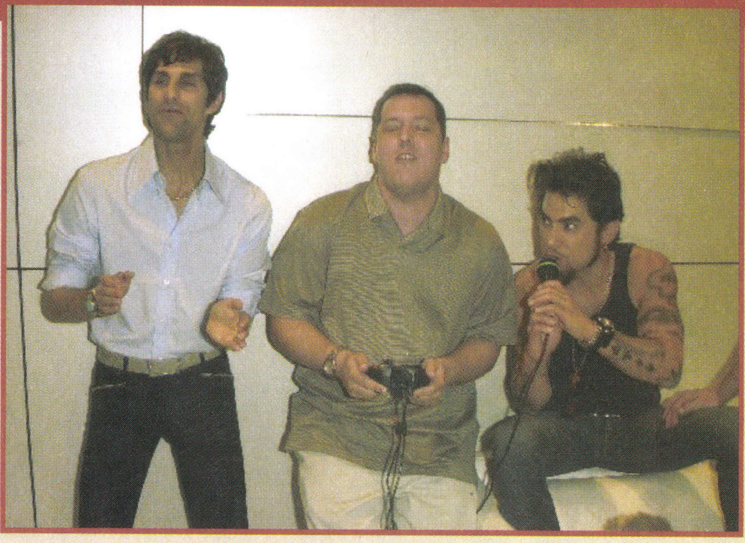
ALMOST EVERY COMPUTER gamer out there has G.A.S.—you know, Gear Acquisition Syndrome. Of course, many (most?) gamers also suffer from A.S.S.—as in "sit-on-it-and-do-nothing-involving-exercise." So until recently, the coolness factor of having a Global Positioning System receiver has often been outweighed by the need to actually move away from the computer desk chair to get it to do anything. What might swing you over the edge? Well, games, of course—tie games into a GPS receiver and your thin sheet of willpower (or thick sheet of laziness) may be broken.

For example, take the Garmin Geko line. The Geko 101 doesn't have any built-in games, but the Geko 201 has four, and the Geko 301, which should be out by the time you read this, adds a fifth. The concept is simple: you pick a game, and then instead of moving a controller, you move yourself, holding the Geko as you work through the game's objectives. Geko games include *Virtua Maze*, which has you running through an invisible maze after little objects; *Geko Smak* (whack-a-mole writ large); and in the Geko 301, *Gekoid*, an *Asteroids*-clone that uses the 301's digital compass to sense you spinning in place as you turn your "ship" (also the only game playable indoors).

The units have small, low-resolution digital displays on which you see yourself moving across a virtual playing field. Admittedly the games are simple in the grand scheme of gaming (think Atari 2600-level resolutions), but it's the concept that's intriguing, especially given the direction the technology is going. Take Garmin's upcoming iQue 3600, a Palm OS-based PDA with a much higher-res color display and GPS built right in. While there haven't been any announcements of GPS-enabled games for the iQue, Garmin has already said it will make a software development kit available to developers. Think of a game of *Quake* where you actually have to move to succeed. And it's probably inevitable that someone will tie GPS, PDA, and WiFi together to get networked GPS gaming—those old dorm games of Assassin will never be the same when they go campus-wide. *—Scott Udell*

There's a Riot Going On

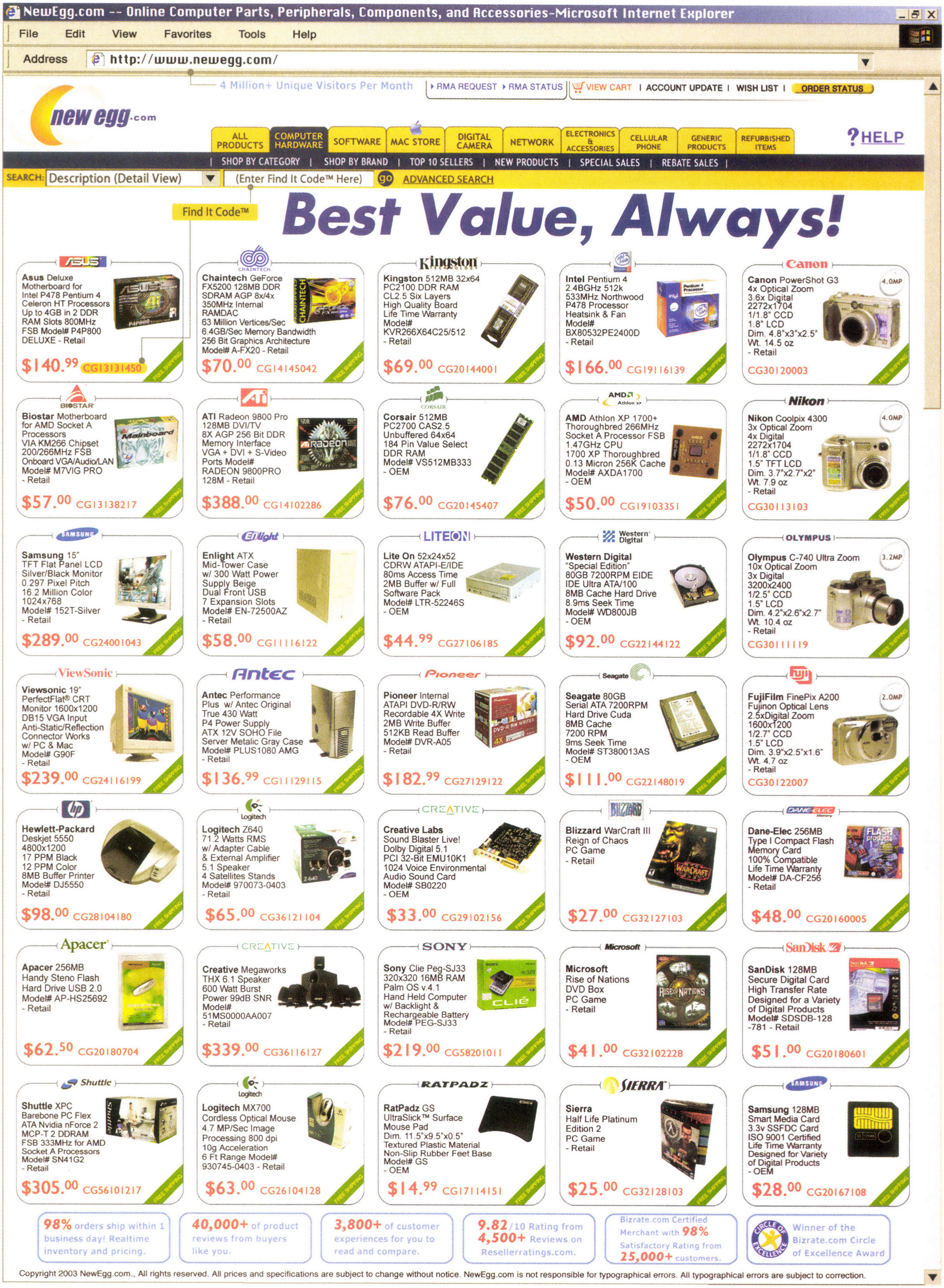
Gaming gets grungy at this year's Lollapalooza festival


Look, the guys from Jane's Addiction play games (Perry Farrell, far left, Dave Navarro, far right). Or at least they watch someone else while clapping.

A RECONSTITUTED Jane's Addiction is headlining this year's Lollapalooza festival, and gaming is at the forefront of the second stage. The festival, which runs through August, is "presented by Xbox," which is the console's latest attempt at connecting with that wacky youth culture. Other bands committed to this year's show include Audioslave, Incubus, The Donnas, Jurassic 5, and on some dates, Queens of the Stone Age, and A Perfect Circle.

The gaming section, dubbed "GameRiot" to apparently further reinforce the idea that games=violence, features a number of Xbox games with competitions around *Brute Force*, *Midtown Madness 3*, *Soul Calibur II*, *Return to Castle Wolfenstein*, and *Tony Hawk's Underground*. In addition to console games, NVIDIA will have a special PC Gaming Zone with Alienware PCs and *America's Army*.

Despite the progressive nature of past Lollapaloozas, it seems the new "GameRiot" is a bit "Jurassic." While each competition is broadcast across Lollapalooza's screens, players can "...feel the pressure of the GameRiot Girls, massaging the competition drums as you work your way up to the ultimate FreakBox finale, where Lollapalooza's main stage spotlight shines on you," according to the event's press release. GameRiot Girls? FreakBox? Welcome to the future. *—Steve Bauman*



NewEgg.com -- Online Computer Parts, Peripherals, Components, and Accessories-Microsoft Internet Explorer

Best Value, Always!

Asus Deluxe Motherboard for Intel P478 Pentium 4 Celeron HT Processors Up to 4GB in 2 DDR RAM Slots 800MHz FSB Model# P4P800 DELUXE - Retail
$140.99 CG13131450

Chaintech GeForce FX5200 128MB DDR SDRAM AGP 8x/4x 350MHz Internal RAMDAC 63 Million Vertices/Sec 6.4GB/Sec Memory Bandwidth 256 Bit Graphics Architecture Model# A-FX20 - Retail
$70.00 CG14145042

Kingston 512MB 32x64 PC2100 DDR RAM CL2.5 Six Layers High Quality Board Life Time Warranty Model# KVR266X64C25/512 - Retail
$69.00 CG20144001

Intel Pentium 4 2.4BGHz 512k 533MHz Northwood P478 Processor Heatsink & Fan Model# BX80532PE2400D - Retail
$166.00 CG19116139

Canon PowerShot G3 4x Optical Zoom 3.6x Digital 2272x1704 1/1.8" CCD 1.8" LCD Dim. 4.8"x3"x2.5" Wt. 14.5 oz - Retail
4.0MP
CG30120003

Biostar Motherboard for AMD Socket A Processors VIA KM266 Chipset 200/266MHz FSB Onboard VGA/Audio/LAN Model# M7VIG PRO - Retail
$57.00 CG13138217

ATI Radeon 9800 Pro 128MB DVI/TV 8X AGP 256 Bit DDR Memory Interface VGA + DVI + S-Video Ports Model# RADEON 9800PRO 128M - Retail
$388.00 CG14102286

Corsair 512MB PC2700 CAS2.5 Unbuffered 64x64 184 Pin Value Select DDR RAM Model# VS512MB333 - OEM
$76.00 CG20145407

AMD Athlon XP 1700+ Thoroughbred 266MHz Socket A Processor FSB 1.47GHz CPU 1700 XP Thoroughbred 0.13 Micron 256K Cache Model# AXDA1700 - OEM
$50.00 CG19103351

Nikon Coolpix 4300 3x Optical Zoom 4x Digital 2272x1704 1/1.8" CCD 1.5" TFT LCD Dim. 3.7"x2.7"x2" Wt. 7.9 oz - Retail
4.0MP
CG30113103

Samsung 15" TFT Flat Panel LCD Silver/Black Monitor 0.297 Pixel Pitch 16.2 Million Color 1024x768 Model# 152T-Silver - Retail
$289.00 CG24001043

Enlight ATX Mid-Tower Case w/ 300 Watt Power Supply Beige Dual Front USB 7 Expansion Slots Model# EN-72500AZ - Retail
$58.00 CG11116122

Lite On 52x24x52 CDRW ATAPI-E/IDE 80ms Access Time 2MB Buffer w/ Full Software Pack Model# LTR-52246S - OEM
$44.99 CG27106185

Western Digital "Special Edition" 80GB 7200RPM EIDE IDE Ultra ATA/100 8MB Cache Hard Drive 8.9ms Seek Time Model# WD800JB - OEM
$92.00 CG22144122

Olympus C-740 Ultra Zoom 10x Optical Zoom 3x Digital 3200x2400 1/2.5" CCD 1.5" LCD Dim. 4.2"x2.6"x2.7" Wt. 10.4 oz - Retail
3.2MP
CG30111119

Viewsonic 19" PerfectFlat® CRT Monitor 1600x1200 DB15 VGA Input Anti-Static/Reflection Connector Works w/ PC & Mac Model# G90F - Retail
$239.00 CG24116199

Antec Performance Plus w/ Antec Original True 430 Watt P4 Power Supply ATX 12V SOHO File Server Metalic Gray Case Model# PLUS1080 AMG - Retail
$136.99 CG11129115

Pioneer Internal ATAPI DVD-R/RW Recordable 4X Write 2MB Write Buffer 512KB Read Buffer Model# DVR-A05 - Retail
$182.99 CG27129122

Seagate 80GB Serial ATA 7200RPM Hard Drive Cuda 8MB Cache 7200 RPM 9ms Seek Time Model# ST380013AS - OEM
$111.00 CG22148019

FujiFilm FinePix A200 Fujinon Optical Lens 2.5xDigital Zoom 1600x1200 1/2.7" CCD 1.5" LCD Dim. 3.9"x2.5"x1.6" Wt. 4.7 oz - Retail
2.0MP
CG30122007

Hewlett-Packard Deskjet 5550 4800x1200 17 PPM Black 12 PPM Color 8MB Buffer Printer Model# DJ5550 - Retail
$98.00 CG28104180

Logitech Z640 71.2 Watts RMS w/ Adapter Cable & External Amplifier 5.1 Speaker 4 Satellites Stands Model# 970073-0403 - Retail
$65.00 CG36121104

Creative Labs Sound Blaster Live! Dolby Digital 5.1 PCI 32-Bit EMU10K1 1024 Voice Environmental Audio Sound Card Model# SB0220 - OEM
$33.00 CG29102156

Blizzard WarCraft III Reign of Chaos PC Game - Retail
$27.00 CG32127103

Dane-Elec 256MB Type I Compact Flash Memory Card 100% Compatible Life Time Warranty Model# DA-CF256 - Retail
$48.00 CG20160005

Apacer 256MB Handy Steno Flash Hard Drive USB 2.0 Model# AP-HS25692 - Retail
$62.50 CG20180704

Creative Megaworks THX 6.1 Speaker 600 Watt Burst Power 99dB SNR Model# 51MS0000AA007 - Retail
$339.00 CG36116127

Sony Clie Peg-SJ33 320x320 16MB RAM Palm OS v.4.1 Hand Held Computer w/ Backlight & Rechargeable Battery Model# PEG-SJ33 - Retail
$219.00 CG58201011

Microsoft Rise of Nations DVD Box PC Game - Retail
$41.00 CG32102228

SanDisk 128MB Secure Digital Card High Transfer Rate Designed for a Variety of Digital Products Model# SDSDB-128 -781 - Retail
$51.00 CG20180601

Shuttle XPC Barebone PC Flex ATA Nvidia nForce 2 MCP-T 2 DDRAM FSB 333MHz for AMD Socket A Processors Model# SN41G2 - Retail
$305.00 CG56101217

Logitech MX700 Cordless Optical Mouse 4.7 MP/Sec Image Processing 800 dpi 10g Acceleration 6 Ft Range Model# 930745-0403 - Retail
$63.00 CG26104128

RatPadz GS UltraSlick™ Surface Mouse Pad Dim. 11.5"x9.5"x0.5" Textured Plastic Material Non-Slip Rubber Feet Base Model# GS - OEM
$14.99 CG17114151

Sierra Half Life Platinum Edition 2 PC Game - Retail
$25.00 CG32128103

Samsung 128MB Smart Media Card 3.3v SSFDC Card ISO 9001 Certified Life Time Warranty Designed for Variety of Digital Products - OEM
$28.00 CG20167108

98% orders ship within 1 business day! Realtime inventory and pricing.

40,000+ of product reviews from buyers like you.

3,800+ of customer experiences for you to read and compare.

9.82/10 Rating from 4,500+ Reviews on Resellerratings.com.

Bizrate.com Certified Merchant with 98% Satisfactory Rating from 25,000+ customers.

Winner of the Bizrate.com Circle of Excellence Award

Copyright 2003 NewEgg.com., All rights reserved. All prices and specifications are subject to change without notice. NewEgg.com is not responsible for typographical errors. All typographical errors are subject to correction.

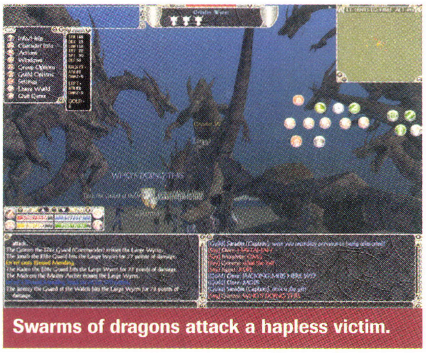
Hacked and Slashed

Shadowbane endures a hack attack

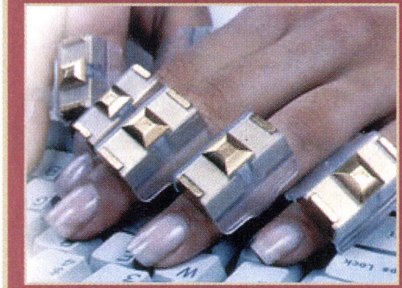
THANKS LARGELY TO the Internet, gamers operate with a sort of collective intelligence. All it takes is for one person to figure something out then—bang!—it's on the Internet, and everybody knows. That collective intelligence also puts a special nasty twist on Murphy's law: anything that can be hacked, will be. If gamers want to cheat at single-player games by tinkering with game code, no one else gets troubled. But when you're playing a massively-multiplayer online game like *Shadowbane*, there's no such thing as private hack.

How about logging in to your Assassin only to be forcibly teleported ... to an underwater city ... where high level monsters attack you ... while you drown? It happened in late May on several *Shadowbane* servers. On the Scorn server, the interlopers created a city named "Buggy Code" owned by the nation of "Wolfsack." Safehold cities were rendered distinctly unsafe, and player cities were assaulted with a vengeance. A group of players tinkering with the client-side code—the part of the game that sits on your computer, not on the server—discovered that they could mark themselves as Game Masters, with all the powers attendant on the title. Havoc ensued. Accusations flew. Publisher and developer scrambled and finally shut down the servers until both could implement a fix.

When the dust settled, the hack/exploit was discovered to be the work of a few guilds, at least one of which saw all of its members banned as a result of the incident. Certain other individual members of the other implicated guilds also felt the not-too-gentle rap of the ban stick. And not just banned from *Shadowbane*, but from any other UbiSoft online games now and in the future. Judging by forum board traffic, many players simply chuckled and shook their heads. Others, however, decided enough was enough and declared their intention to quit the game. That costs money. Suffice it to say, publishers and developers take that pretty seriously. *—Robert de los Reyes, Esq.*


Swarms of dragons attack a hapless victim.

spotlight



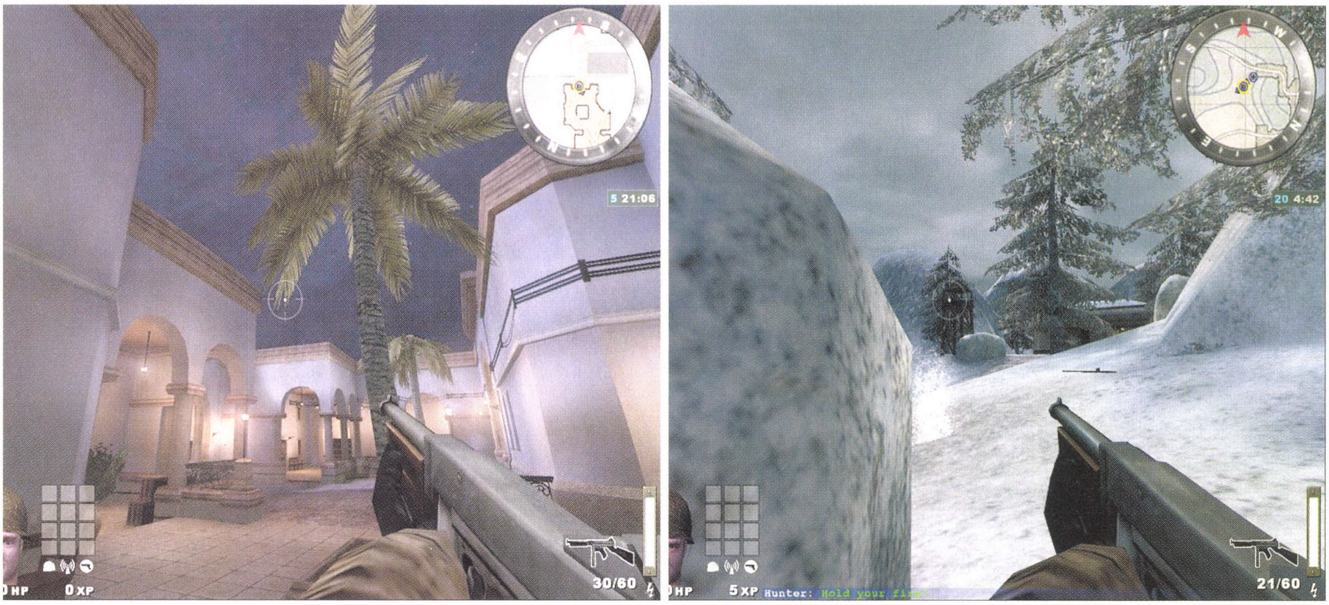
Gamer Bling Bling

Are you looking for an edge in competitive gaming? Sure, you could try "MindFX Maxx Impulse" energy pills, but who knows when the drug testing may start? Instead of going down that route, maybe you should try working out your fingers. Enter FingerWeights, a 5, 10, and 15 gram weighted ring system designed to strengthen and condition the muscles and tendons in fingers, hands, wrists, and forearms. Designed primarily to treat symptoms of RSI injuries, their literature says they "Increase the physical performance of the fine motor muscles in the hands." The person who wears these very bling bling weights will have the buffest fingers at the LAN party; what gamer wouldn't want to be that person? [FingerWeight Corporation, $44.95-$99.95]

newsbytes

Out in the cold—There's been a shakeup at the upper levels of Blizzard Entertainment. Vice President Bill Roper and Blizzard North co-founders Erich Schaefer, Max Schaefer, and David Brevik have all left the company to "pursue other opportunities" in the game industry. Blizzard North was the studio responsible for the *Diablo* series. Roper, often the public face of the company, told Gamespot that issues with corporate management at parent company Vivendi Universal played a part in their leaving. He went on to say that he expects Blizzard to continue to make great games, and the four principals are excited about the future. In unrelated news, Blizzard closed over 112,000 *Diablo II* accounts tied to player using cheats or hacks.... **ESRB adds new rating descriptors**—The Entertainment Software Rating Board will require their ratings to be more prominent on boxes, and has broken the Violence category into Cartoon Violence, Fantasy Violence, Intense Violence, and Sexual Violence.... **IDSA challenges Washington violent game ban**—The Interactive Digital Software Association (IDSA) filed suit in a federal court in Washington state challenging a law banning the sale of certain video games to minors as a "content-based" restriction, which goes against first amendment jurisprudence.... **Leagues of gamers**—Two new contenders have emerged to develop competitive gaming leagues: the Global Gaming League (GGL) and Major League Gaming (MLG).... **Still Postal after all these years**—The Postal Service's claims of trademark infringement by Running With Scissors' game *Postal* have been dismissed.... **Parent-in-a-box on sale**—Card Access, Inc. is selling a device to control access to electronic appliances (like PCs) with cards that serve as time-debit cards (www.time-scout.com). **Keyboards are dirty**—Researchers linked a 2002 outbreak of conjunctivitis (pink-eye) at Dartmouth College to the use of keyboards on shared computers. *News courtesy of Frictionless Insight (www.frictionlessinsight.com)*

TRON® 2.0
DATA WRAITH
THE ELITE HACKERS
When data is wrecked,
havoc is wreaked.
The way it's meant to be played
NVIDIA.
NVIDIA GeForce FX
The GPU of Tron 2.0
© Disney



Rock the Casbah in the Tobruk-based Gold Rush map; Rail Gun is set in the wintry confines of a German rail yard.

Return (again) to Castle Wolfenstein

Activision and Splash Damage's freebie may be the best thing to happen to shooter fans this year

WHO SAYS THERE'S no such thing as a free lunch? Publishing and development partners Activision, id Software, and Splash Damage are disproving that old maxim with the release of *Wolfenstein: Enemy Territory*, a team-based multiplayer game that's completely gratis. And where the typical giveaway in this industry is worth precisely what you didn't pay for it, this freebie is one of the best gaming bargains of the year. Deep, class-based gameplay and intricate map design makes it the equal of any recent retail title, even without the presence of the original monosyllabic shooter hero, B.J. Blazcowitz.

It compares well with retail releases because that's how it was conceived. *Enemy Territory* began life as a store-bound stand alone expansion pack for *Return to Castle Wolfenstein*, complete with both a single-player campaign and an extensive suite of multiplayer options. Something wacky happened on the way to the store shelves, though, and Activision wound up canceling the add-on in February due to issues with the solo missions under development at Mad Doc Software. The suits were much happier with the multiplayer mode being created by Splash Damage, however, so they decided to keep it alive and give shooter fans a treat.

"We had made the decision fairly early on that *Wolfenstein: Enemy Territory* would be a full, standalone game," says Marty Stratton, director of business development at id. "By February of this year, the single player portion of the game had not progressed as anticipated, however, the multiplayer component was coming together very well and was incredibly fun. We didn't want that great gameplay to go to waste, so we decided it was in the best interest of the franchise and gamers to cancel the retail release, polish what we had done on the multiplayer side, and release it as a free, stand alone download. It has been a great way to give something extra to players who already love *Return to Castle Wolfenstein*, while at the same time allow new players the ability to explore and have fun with the game and franchise for free."

Don't let all of the "free" references delude you into thinking that *Enemy Territory* is at all second rate. This game might not come with a pricetag and a big glossy box with gruff G.I.s on it, but it sports plenty of big-budget accoutrements nonetheless. Splash Damage has put together one addictive WWII shooter, with everything that you'd expect from a commercial release and then some. The developer worked off of the multiplayer design docs created by Nerve Software for the original *Return to Castle Wolfenstein* and expanded it in every area. Brand-new features were added, and old ideas that were discarded for the original release for one reason or another were revisited.

Class-based gameplay has rarely been this well-realized. All of the character types interlock in a really satisfying rock-paper-scissors fashion that affords almost every sort of playing style. Covert Ops soldiers can steal the uniforms off dead foes and stroll into enemy bases, opening doors for their explosive-toting Engineer comrades. Medics keep everybody else alive. Field Ops play spotter and can call in air strikes on enemy positions. Soldiers do the grunt work, blasting a path for their comrades with their trusty SMGs. All gain experience

TRON® 2.0
MERCURY
THE GAMEBOT
A light cycle champion isn't coded to feel fear.
NVIDIA GeForce FX
The GPU of Tron 2.0
The way it's meant to be played
nVIDIA

© Disney

NZN killed himself.

34HP
-1XP
26/30

ShAdoW was perforated by anus's crew-served MG
You killed fusion
fusion was killed by BT Blazcowitz's Thompson
(ShAdoW) (D,2): I need a Medic!
(ShAdoW) (D,2): I need a Medic!
(BenDover) (B,6): please come back

[M] Private 1st Class Highway317
2HP
5XP
19/60

[left] Medics aren't going to help much against that. [above] Close-quarters combat takes a toll, even when you score a kill.

towards battlefield promotions based on killing enemies and performing class-centric tasks. Medics can rise in rank by either killing foes or healing friends, for example.

All classes also use a new skill system that rewards achievements on the battlefield in three separate categories. Battle Sense and Light Weapons are shared by all classes. Reach specific benchmarks in the former and you'll be awarded binoculars, better starting health, and improved stamina. Improve the latter and you'll be able to carry more ammo and cut down on the time needed to reload weapons. The third category differs for each class, allowing the performance of specialized tasks like setting explosives and directing artillery towards those really pesky MG42 nests.

"We're really happy how the skills, rewards, and ranking worked out," says Paul "Locki" Wedgwood, lead designer and managing director at Splash Damage. "The difficulty was in developing a system where a relatively short campaign could reward you with cool skill improvements, but were not so overwhelming that they made it impossible for players joining a campaign late to have a good time. We wanted to add even more depth to the gameplay, lots of things for players to get better at without the experience being unenjoyable. Hopefully, people will still be playing *Enemy Territory* in two or three years time, because there will still be stuff to master."

Just six maps come with the default download, although their size, complexity, and numerous built-in objectives (stealing Nazi gold, blowing up command posts, etc.) that enhance teamwork and class skills makes it doubtful that players will get bored. Also, these settings represent so many theaters of war that you might as well call this a cineplex. While your battles are confined to North Africa and Western Europe, you get to take part in different operations spread across varied terrain types over two three-map campaigns. Every map is strong, although Würzburg Radar, where the Allies hunt for circuit boards in Hitler's backyard, and Gold Rush, which is a tense close-quarters battle in the narrow streets of the Egyptian town Tobruk, are probably the most exciting. Maps can be played separately or linked, although the latter best shows the game's strengths as class stats and skills are carried over from one mission to the next.

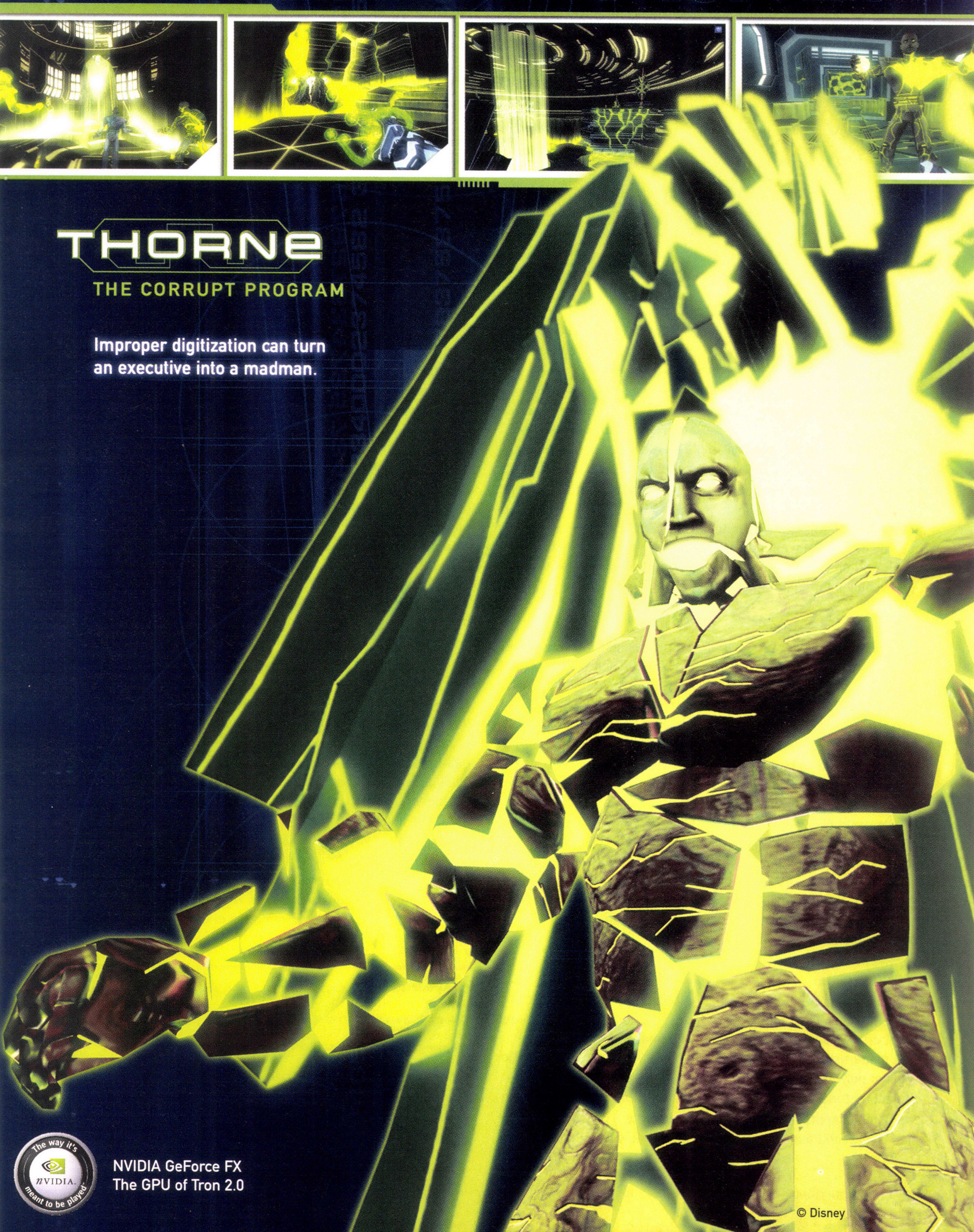
Response to this *Lonely Planet*-like tour has been nothing short of overwhelming. Both Stratton and Wedgwood confess that they've been "blown away" over how the multiplayer community has embraced the game. Player numbers have been extremely high so far. The game was launched without the technical support given most retail releases, a decision that made sense given the online-only distribution, but almost turned disastrous when players flooded the servers from the get-go.

"We hoped people would like it, but only one week after release we were amazed to read on another site that, despite having only a third as many servers as other games, we were—and are still—regularly sitting in the number two or three slot when it comes to player numbers," comments a clearly satisfied Wedgwood. "Hopefully we'll soon see even more servers, and even more frag-happy *Enemy Territory* players."

Stratton confirms that both id and Activision have been paying attention. A patch has already been released to boost server stability and performance. That should in turn add to the number of servers available and get even more people happily stripping the uniforms off corpses and calling in air strikes. For its part, Splash Damage is working on what Wedgwood calls "really comprehensive" level editors and design tools. These programs, which might be available from the official *Return to Castle Wolfenstein* web site by the time you read this, will provide modders with all the equipment required to make their own *Enemy Territory* maps.

Still, neither id or Activision is willing to commit to doing anything further with the *Castle Wolfenstein* franchise at the moment. Stratton says that while everyone has been "incredibly happy with the response from players" and that *Enemy Territory* has "re-energized" the franchise for both longtime fans and newcomers alike, future plans remain up in the air. But you can probably consider this more of a corporate line than any statement of real intent. With success stories like this, we certainly haven't seen the last of B.J. Blazcowitz. *—Brett Todd*

TRON® 2.0



THORNE

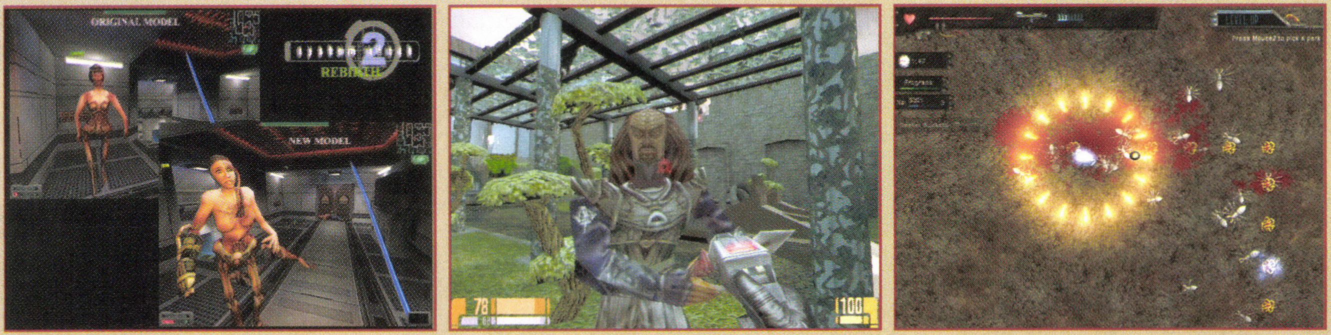
THE CORRUPT PROGRAM

Improper digitization can turn an executive into a madman.

NVIDIA GeForce FX
The GPU of Tron 2.0

© Disney

mods & ends



What a difference 3.75MB makes in System Shock 2 Rebirth; Test your fluency with Klingon in Colony 7 for Elite Force; Robotron 2084 comes to 2003 in Crimsonland.

Choose Your Battlefield

Electronic Arts has given in to the blitzkrieg of demands and released a map editor for *Battlefield 1942*. The beta program comes without official support, but it should be more than enough to get armchair Anzio lovers pulling out those WWII encyclopedias and designing battlefields of their very own. A comprehensive version 1.4 patch (required if you want to use the editor) was released at the same time. This big file—70MB for the whole enchilada and 28MB for the upgrade from 1.31—includes all sorts of improvements and additions big and small. Most of the changes involve subtle enhancements to gameplay and minor tweaks, like the revamped Russian and Japanese assault rifles, the addition of a delay every time you draw a new weapon, louder grenade explosions, and an effort to stop camping by removing the ability for land vehicles to repair in hangars.

How 'Bout 'Nam?

Speaking of *Battlefield 1942*, there's a promising total conversion of the game in the works called *Eve of Destruction*. The mod takes its name from the Barry McGuire protest song about the Vietnam War, which seems fitting since the setting is straight out of *Full Metal Jacket*. Team EoD is swapping the fields and forests of Europe for the steamy jungles of Southeast Asia, giving players the chance to turn in their Mustangs for Huey Cobras and their M-1s for M-60s. A 180MB "12% Demo" (so called because the mod is believed to be 12% complete) was just posted to the official web site at press time. This modest percentage contains a lot of playable content, however, including soldiers representing the US, Republic of Vietnam, Viet Cong, and North Vietnamese fighting forces, nine weapons, and thirteen vehicles. Look for a 20% Demo to be available around the time you get this, and EA itself is jumping on the Vietnam bandwagon with a retail game: *Battlefield Vietnam*.

Born Again

System Shock 2 fan Etienne Albert is bringing SHODAN back to life. Everyone's favorite post-HAL homicidal computer is revitalized in Albert's *System Shock 2 Rebirth*, an enhanced graphics mod that modernizes the 1999 release with high-res models. All of the original polygon meshes are up for replacement, a renovation project that makes a lot of sense since the Dark engine powering the game is approaching its fifth birthday. The 3.75MB beta version of the mod features stunning new meshes of six character types, such as the dead Rickenbacker and Von Braun crewmen, the ghosts, and the cyborg assassin. While *System Shock 2* has always been more about moody atmosphere than top-of-the-line visual effects, these new models are a big improvement over the originals. If anything, the game is even scarier now. Albert plans to tackle the remaining models in subsequent releases.

Colonization Without Sid Meier

Trekkies shouldn't get rid of the original *Star Trek Voyager: Elite Force* just yet. Even though *Elite Force II* is the current flavor of the month, mods are still coming out for its predecessor. Good mods, too, like Colony 7. This blockbuster of a total conversion features an epic Trek storyline spanning 26 levels. Dozens of scripted sequences are featured, along with over 700 lines of new dialogue. The number of voice samples pumps the download size to nearly 100MB, but it's worth it when you consider that the amateur acting here actually tops anything Scott Bakula's done on *Enterprise*.

Knee-Deep in the Dead

Anyone hankering for a modern remake of *Robotron 2084* should take a look at *Crimsonland*. This shareware release from Finnish developer 10tons Entertainment is the closest that anyone's come to recreating the kill-a-second fury of the old Williams arcade game, including the top-down view and never-ending swarm of alien adversaries. It even has a little depth, courtesy of 15 slaughter-friendly weapons (hello, Ion Gun), lots of cool power-ups and perks (be sure to try Telekinesis), and three game modes, including two that let you level-up your character. Be sure to download the 7MB game and the 3MB music add-on pack today, because publishing rights have been snapped up by Reflexive Entertainment (*Lionheart*, *Star Trek: Away Team*), and who knows how much longer the files will remain online.

Links

Battlefield 1942 www.eagames.com/official/battlefield1942

Colony 7 www.colony7.net

Crimsonland crimsonland.reflexive.com/crimsonland

Eve of Destruction eod.bfcentral.com

System Shock 2 Rebirth perso.wanadoo.fr/etienne.aubert/sshock/sshock_rebirth.htm

TRON® 2.0

ENTER

THE WORLD INSIDE YOUR COMPUTER.

A viral agent threatens computer systems worldwide.
Countermeasure programs have identified you as the source.
Battle to survive the sinister conspiracy that threatens
to corrupt one reality and forever transform another.

JET BRADLEY
THE USER
The word surrender does not compute.

AVAILABLE AUGUST 26, 2003

WWW.TRON20.NET

TEEN
T
CONTENT RATED BY ESRB
Violence

PC CD ROM

POWERED BY gamespy

MONOLITH

SOUNDS BEST ON Sound BLASTER 24-bit

Maximize your experience with pentium® 4

BUENA VISTA INTERACTIVE

The way it's meant to be played
NVIDIA.

© Disney. GameSpy and the "Powered by GameSpy" design are trademarks of GameSpy Industries, Inc. All rights reserved. NVIDIA, the NVIDIA logo, NVIDIA The Way it's Meant to be Played logo and other NVIDIA marks are trademarks of NVIDIA Corporation in the United States and other countries. The Pentium mark is a trademark or registered trademark of Intel Corporation or its subsidiaries in the United States and other countries. The ratings icon is a registered trademark of the Interactive Digital Software Association. All other trademarks and trade names are the properties of their respective owners.

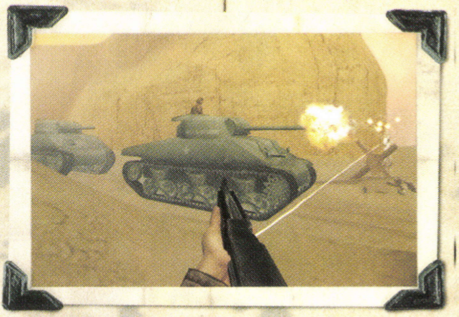
NVIDIA GeForce FX
The GPU of Tron 2.0

Behind every deadly Nazi tank is another deadly Nazi tank.

1943, German Panzer tank divisions guard the gates of Europe, controlling the ports of North Africa and the advance of an Allied army with bloody force. Of all the weapons in its arsenal the most feared was its reputation. Face your fears, free North Africa and fight for history to repeat itself.

February 14, 1943 Tunisia, Kasserine Pass

The 5th Panzer division punishes the US 2nd Corps in their initial assault, inflicting grievous losses.



February 22, 1943 Tunisia, Kasserine Pass

Take back the Pass. Fight through German lines, encountering allied and axis tanks and troops. Steal a German tank and inflict continuous casualties on unsuspecting Nazis.

May 7, 1943 Allies Take Tunisia

RATING PENDING
RP
CONTENT RATED BY ESRB

Visit www.esrb.org or call 1-800-771-3772 for Rating Information.

PC CD-ROM SOFTWARE

***Requires Medal of Honor Allied Assault™ to play.**

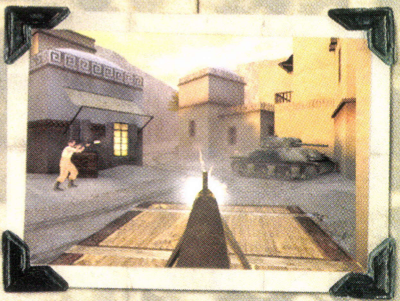
©2003 Electronic Arts Inc. Electronic Arts, EA GAMES, the EA GAMES logo, "You Don't Play, You Volunteer.",Medal of Honor Allied Assault and "Challenge Everything" are trademarks or registered trademarks of Electronic Arts in the U.S. and/or other countries. Medal of Honor is a trademark or registered trademark of Electronic Arts Inc. in the U.S. and/or other countries for computer and video game products. All rights reserved. All other trademarks are the property of their respective owners. EA GAMES™ is an Electronic Arts™ brand.

July 13, 1943 Sicily, Italy

Glide into Sicily under the cover of night with a dead pilot at the controls, crash land in the Italian countryside and find your unit. The assault on the boot begins.

January 22, 1944 Anzio Maneuver

Destroy Germany's K5 rail guns, making the landing at Anzio safe for the Allied 3rd.



October 6, 1943 Bizerte Canal

Cross the Canal under heavy fire and hit the ground gunning. Engage the enemy in street combat to take command of the German port city.

May 17, 1944 Exiting Monte Cassino

German Panzer divisions surround you. They can't get away this time. Smash, cripple and exploit the heavy armor with the new British PIAT Anti-Tank Weapon.

ELEVEN SINGLE-PLAYER LEVELS THAT WILL DETERMINE THE FATE OF EUROPE.

ENTER AND EXIT VEHICLES INCLUDING THE M4 SHERMAN TANK. TAKE POWs.

NEW SOLDIER MODELS, SKINS AND VOICES INCLUDING AMERICAN, BRITISH AND ITALIAN TROOPS.

MULTIPLAYER BATTLES: TUG-OF-WAR MODE, OBJECTIVE MODE AND LIBERATION MODE.

You Don't Play, You Volunteer.™ Enlist at moh.ea.com

MEDAL OF HONOR ALLIED ASSAULT

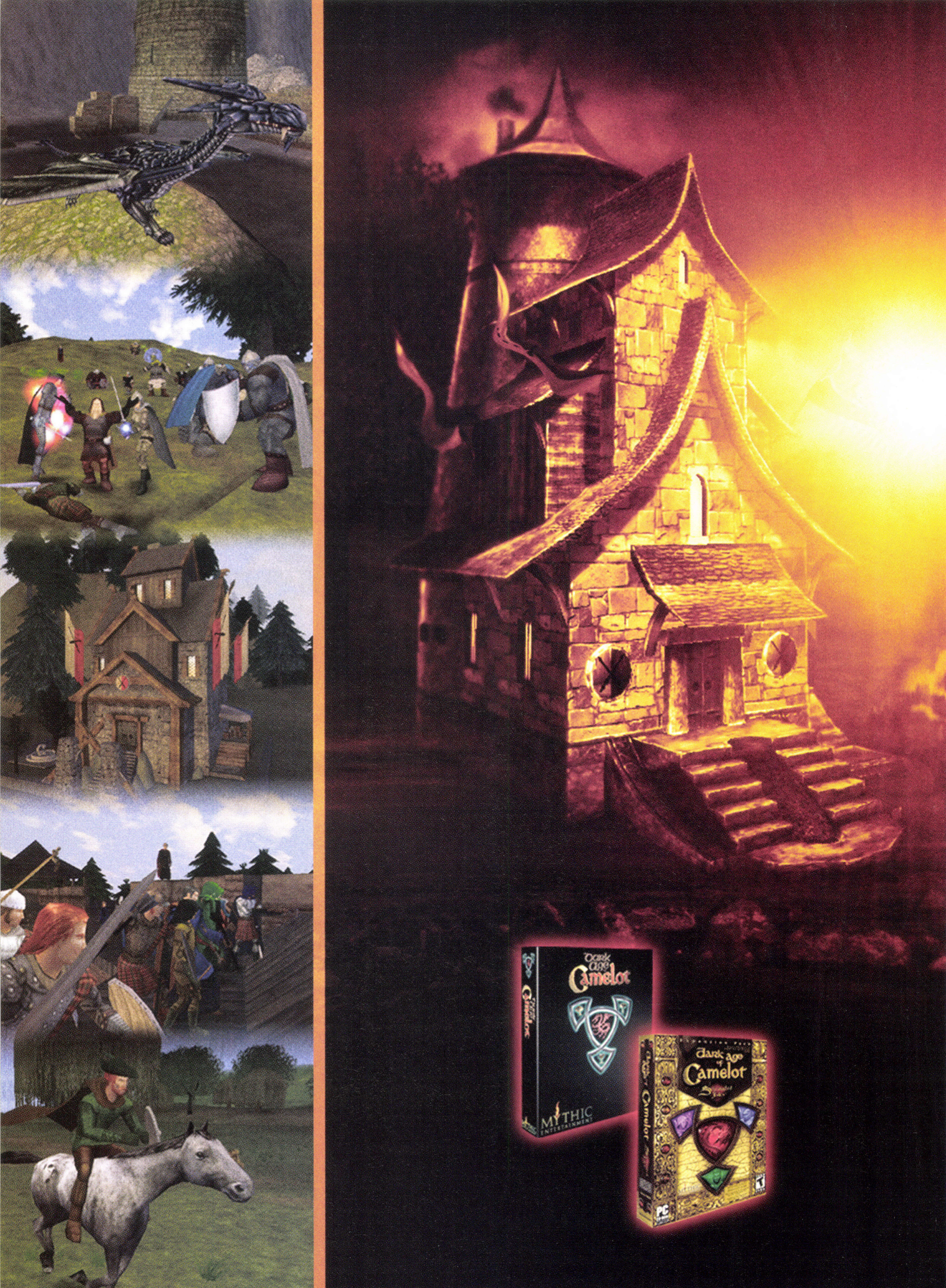
SECOND EDITION NORTH AFRICA

BREAKTHROUGH

EXPANSION PACK*

EA GAMES

CHALLENGE EVERYTHING™


Dark Age of Camelot
Camelot
MYTHIC ENTERTAINMENT
Dark Age of Camelot
Camelot
PC
T

STAKE YOUR CLAIM
Dark Age of Camelot
IT'S WHAT YOU HAVE BEEN FIGHTING FOR

Always Evolving. Constantly Growing. An online world that grows richer and more vibrant each day. Dark Age of Camelot quickly became the most critically acclaimed MMORPG of the year and has continued the quest to reign supreme over the lands. Since then, adventurers in our lands have seen the addition of hundreds of new monsters ravaging, scores of new quests to complete, have discovered ways to create magical items and epic new areas, fraught with perils and rewards, to explore. Last winter saw the release of the first expansion pack, Shrouded Isles, revealing three new continents, three new races, six new classes, and a graphic engine that made Dark Age of Camelot the envy of its competitors. Now we're introducing the most robust player housing found in any MMORPG. If you haven't visited our world before, it is time to discover the magic of our Realms; if you are someone whose absence from Camelot has been sorely missed, it is time to come home again, to the challenge, danger and enchantment of the Dark Age of Camelot.

TEEN
T
CONTENT RATED BY ESRB
Violence

MYTHIC ENTERTAINMENT

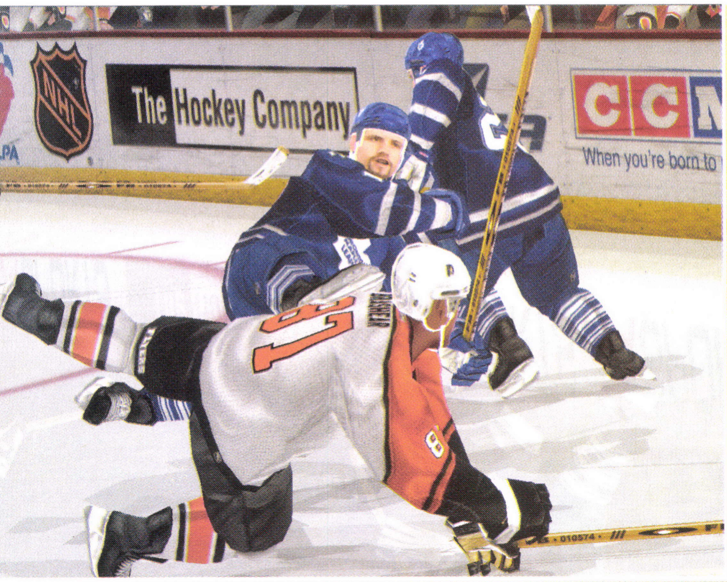
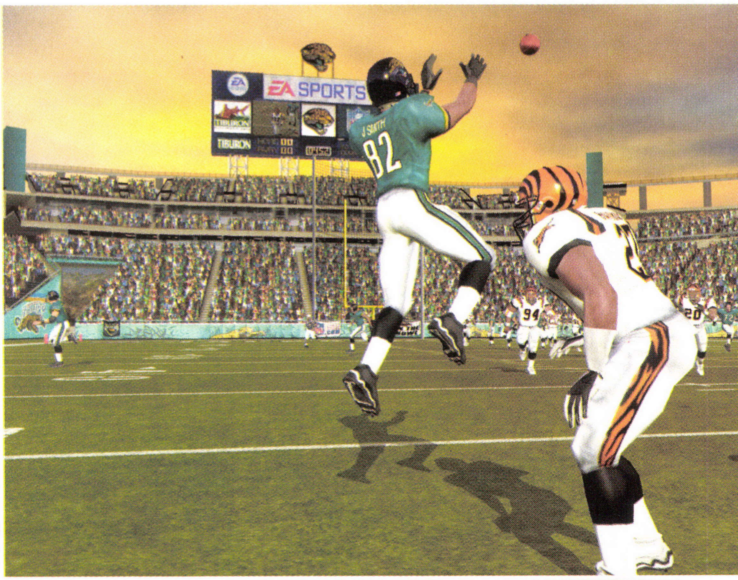
The way it's meant to be played NVIDIA

www.darkageofcamelot.com

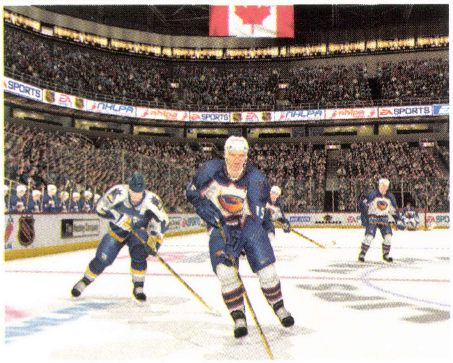
INTERNET CONNECTION AND ADDITIONAL ONLINE FEES REQUIRED

PC CD-ROM SOFTWARE

Copyright © 2003 Mythic Entertainment, Inc. All rights reserved. Mythic Entertainment, the Mythic Entertainment logo, "Dark Age of Camelot", the Dark Age of Camelot logo, and stylized Celtic knot are trademarks of Mythic Entertainment, Inc. Abandon Entertainment and the Abandon Entertainment logo are trademarks of Abandon Entertainment, Inc. All other trademarks property of their respective owners.

And you thought the Madden and NHL series' couldn't look any better? NHL 2004's new development team is insistent on realistic gameplay on and off the ice, while Madden adds a new Owner's mode to its usual mix of arcade action and solid football play.



In the Game 2004

EA Sports reveals its lineup of sports games for 2003-2004

DEVELOPER/PUBLISHER Electronic Arts • RELEASE DATES Fall 2003

BY GEORGE JONES

FROM *MADDEN'S* NEW Owner Mode to a completely revamped *NHL*, the latest lineup from EA Sports augments its arcade gameplay with role-playing and other elements intended to immerse players. The company hopes the result will be an experience where you can actively develop stars and franchises in ways the sports world has never seen.

In *Madden NFL 2004*, scheduled for release late this summer, the all-new Owner Mode will allow you to manage your franchises from ticket and merchandise prices all the way down to coaching staffs. If you long to indulge your inner Al Davis, you can even move your franchise to a new city and build a brand new customized stadium... if you make the right political and financial moves.

On the field, it offers major graphical and gameplay upgrades. A slew of new high-quality animations means that instead of getting "stuck" on opposing blockers and tacklers, you can now use your hands to create space. And in a development that bodes poorly for digital defensive coordinators, *Madden 2004* incorporates more aggressive AI quarterback scrambling. Quarterbacks like Michael Vick and Donovan McNabb will take off from the pocket much more frequently than before.

The game's all-new Playmaker Mode enables you to enact the type of small, and quick adjustments to coverages, schemes, and pass routes that real NFL players make, like directing receivers to break deep on a broken play, or call for a safety to leave his zone and stop the run.

In Owner Mode, the quality of your offensive and defensive coordinators actively affects your players' performances, both positively and negatively. And skill-developing mini-games allow you to develop specific players' attributes based on how well you perform. If you play long enough, you might even see star players retire and begin coaching careers. Terrell Owens as 49ers coach?

By incorporating similar role-playing elements as well as a few unique twists and a brand new development team, EA Sports appears intent on restoring the luster and prestige to the company's *NHL* series. This new design team—EA Black Box in Vancouver—says it's dedicating itself to developing a flow of on-ice action that mimics real-life more than previous *NHL* titles. *NHL 2004* feels a touch slower than before, which allows finer control over the players, like manual dekes with the right analog button, ice and saucer passes, and even a bruise control that allows gamers to calibrate their hits.

Other graphical and gameplay enhancements include two-player hits, quick play calls and defensive sets, and a whole new fighting model that incorporates grappling and counter-punches.

In a new twist for sports games, *NHL 2004*'s Sports Dynasty Mode allows you to develop your skills within the game. As the GM of a franchise, in addition to negotiating contracts and setting practice schedules, you'll also gain experience points to spend on your own skills and those of your franchise. Make a great trade and you'll be rewarded with points you can spend on scouting, marketing, or even medical abilities.

The downside of managing the personnel in a franchise is that if you don't get your high-paid players enough time on the ice, team morale will suffer. But you can always demote disgruntled stars to your minor league system and replace them with fresh young talent.

Tiger Woods 2004 will feature an expanded career mode that includes short challenges and mini-games that will allow you to gradually improve your custom-created golfer's skills. As you play through the various tournaments and challenges, your golfer will gain access to real-life gear by Nike, Calloway, Adidas, Titleist, and more. Play really well and equipment companies will even offer you big dollars and special gear in a corporate sponsorship. In addition to two new fantasy courses, the real-life PGA courses in the game include: St. Andrews, Pebble Beach, The Royal Birkdale Golf Club, and Spyglass.

Finally, soccer fans will be happy to see *FIFA*'s return to the PC. EA Sports' number-one mission in *FIFA 2004* is to enhance play by allowing gamers deeper and more animated on-field controls, as well as a slew of new tactical options that include easy-to-call mid-game adjustments. The game also contains a Career Mode that will allow you to guide your club by making front-office decisions.

With similarly deep plans for *NASCAR Thunder 2004, F1 Challenge 2004*, and the first release of *EA Sports Rugby* in eight years, EA Sports appears more dedicated to its PC sports lineup than ever.

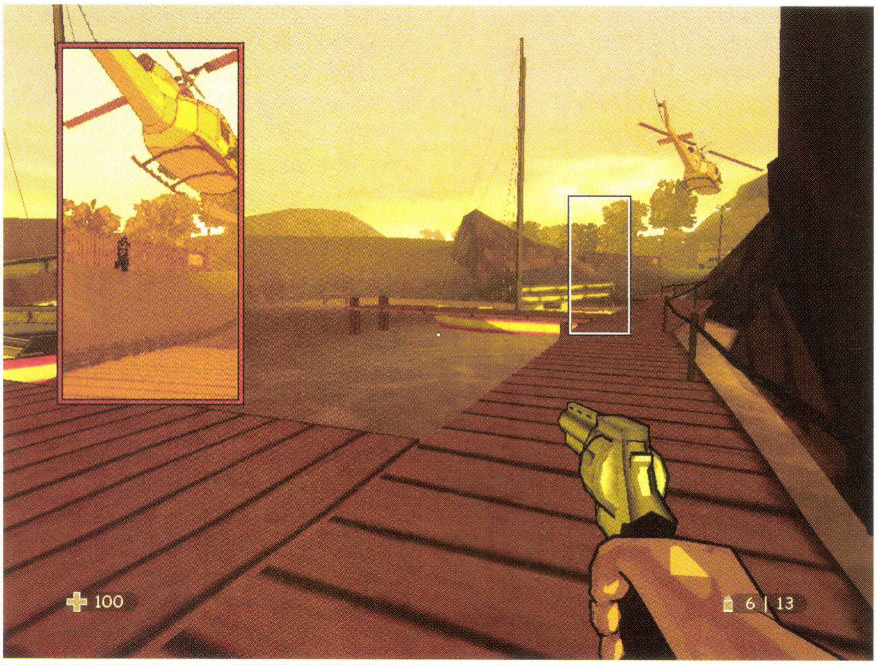
XIII

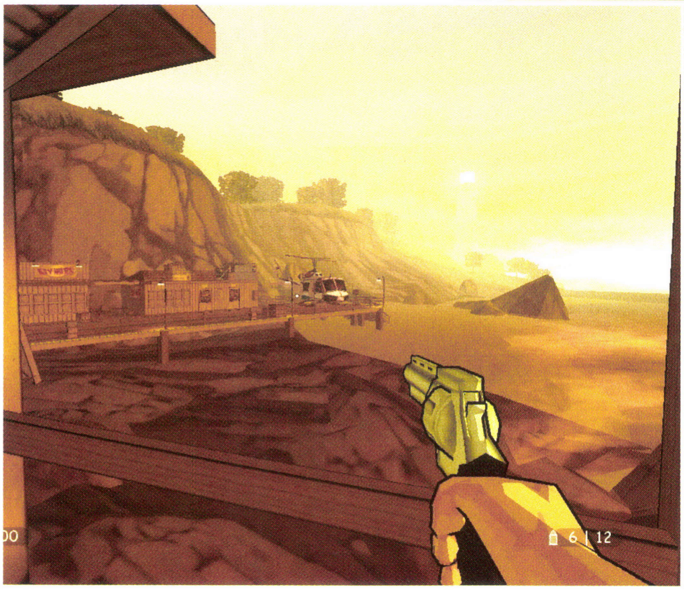
DEVELOPER/PUBLISHER Ubi Soft

RELEASE DATE Fall 2003

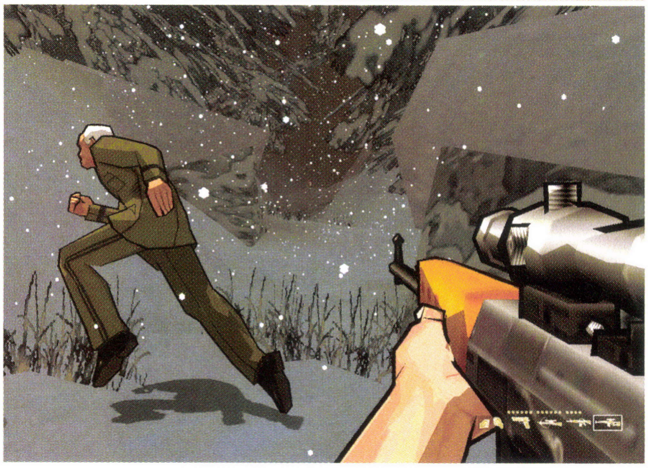
XIII IS Ubi Soft's *Roman Holiday* of graphic novel fun, with the emphasis on "graphic." Yes, the art is comic book style, taken from the French-language work of Jean van Hamme, but the blood flows freely, thrown knifes stick out of foreheads, blood-curdling screams rip across your screen in true *Batman* "Biff! Pow! Kablooie!" style, and the body count ramps up faster than a speed-metal guitar riff. The background for this game—dark conspiracy theory, Euro-style take on American paranoia, rabid cult-following—sounded promising when Ubi Soft unveiled it more than a year ago, and after looking at a late version of the game, it's reassuring to find out that the promise still stands.

It's clear that Ubi Soft is making good use of the *Unreal* license; the game tweaks Epic's code a lot, with good results. It's obvious that the cel-shaded style sets this game apart from other *Unreal* titles, but you'll also notice that the AI, the damage system, and the interactive environment





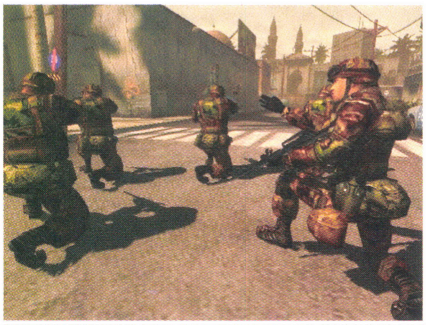
[above] Your sixth-sense at work, showing you the bad guys arriving in pure comic book fashion. [left] The graphic novel look is spot on and perfect for the theme. [below] Allies will expect you to protect their sorry butts when they run out in the open.



are heavily modified. This is one of those games where if you see a bottle or an ashtray, yes, you can pick it up and whack someone on the head. Why would you want to? It makes less noise than lobbing a grenade at them, that's why. You'll find that stealth is an extremely useful tactic, and in addition to the usual silenced pistol, you have noiseless throwing knives, muted crossbows, and now silent ashtrays at your disposal. Of the quiet lot, the knives seem to deliver the best "bang for the buck," as they deliver a solid "thwack!" when they hit, and then reward you with the nifty sight of the hilt protruding from some thug's forehead. Still, it's the bigger, noisier weapons that dominate the action, and from the .44 pistol to the bazooka, they have good "oomph" and a solid feel. The game rewards good aim with insta-kill headshots, and firing your assault rifle or light machine-gun full-auto will cause the weapon to rise and kick realistically.

XIII's environments are impressive, if not always terribly original. There's the warehouse, the naval base, and the cable car facility, but there's also a deserted beach resort and a barroom brawl space, among others. It's not the hokey Sunday comics look you might expect, but rather a deliciously sharp-edged yet subtle beauty. The lighting is excellent, and the actual level design, while fully within the bounds of your typical shooter paradigm, is chock full of nooks and crannies full of goodies and alternative solutions. You can either run through a series of slowly closing security doors while blasting the guards, or take a more stealthy approach, using your grappling hook and snaking through ventilation shafts to get to the same location.

Your enemies aren't brain-dead, thankfully. You can sneak up on them and hear snippets of conversation, reminiscent of the *No One Lives Forever* games, but more importantly they tend to notice things like, say, a machine-gun blast ripping into their buddy or a rocket slamming into their groin. They roll, take cover, fire with reasonable but not preternatural accuracy, and generally act like good action game goons should—not Rambo, but not Gomer Pyle USMC either. Your "sixth sense" shows up as a highlight box outlining foes before you can see them, giving you a chance to hide or switch to an appropriate instrument of destruction. Boss fights and timed sequences either add spice or annoyance, depending on your tolerance level; the save game system for the PC is still uncertain at this point, and will go a long way toward determining how frustrating some levels will be, and as always, the ultimate test will be finding the right balance for the AI. *—Cindy Yans*



Full Spectrum Warrior

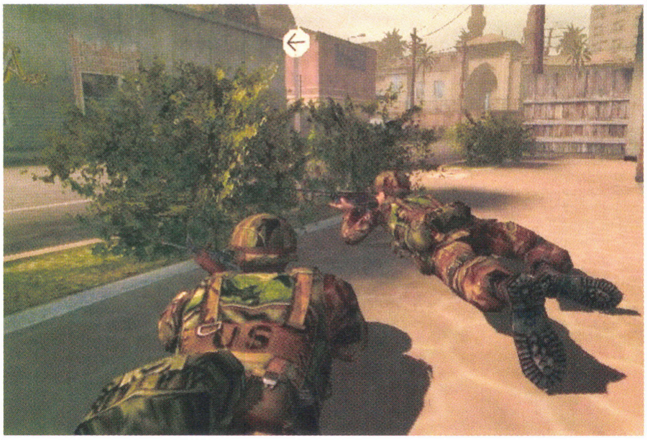
DEVELOPER Pandemic Studios
PUBLISHER THQ
RELEASE DATE 2004

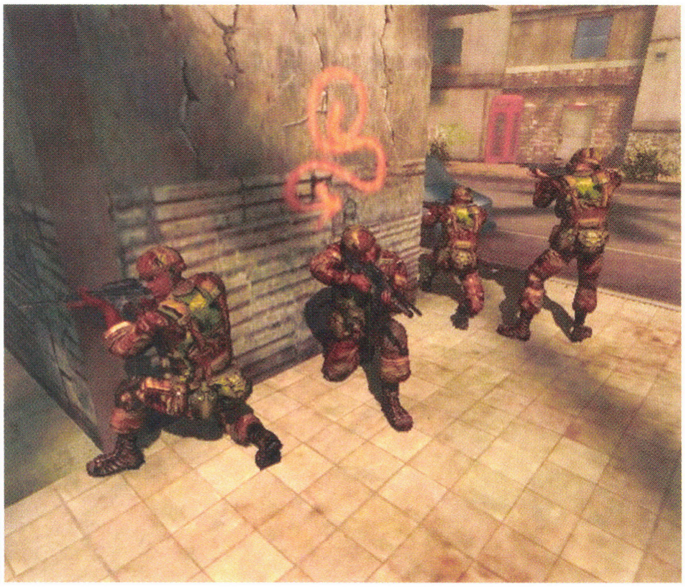
AT FIRST GLANCE, *Full Spectrum Warrior* looks like the zillion other tactical shooters on the market or in development. You see the screenshots of realistic soldiers wandering through urban areas and think, "Hmm, *Rainbow Six*? *Black Hawk Down*?" But there's a big difference that separates it from the pack: this is not a shooter, it's a 3D real-time tactical strategy game. You don't control any individual soldier, you give orders to the team leaders and they follow them based on proper military protocol.

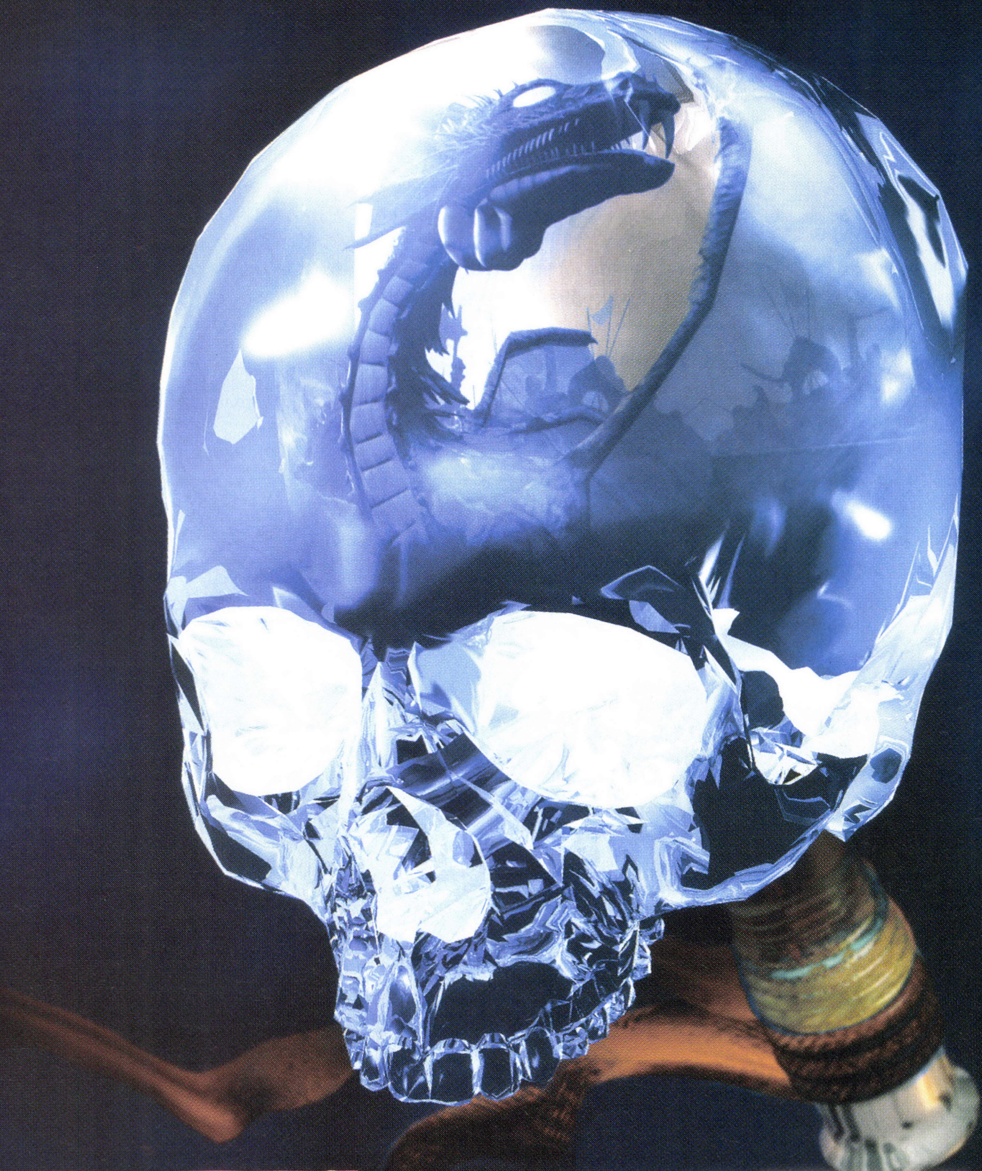
Everyone says their game follows "proper military protocol," but when it comes to realism, *Full Spectrum Warrior* has slightly higher standards due to its original publisher. The U.S. Army contracted with developer Pandemic to produce the original for the Xbox to help reinforce and teach light infantry urban combat tactics. THQ is publishing a commercial version for Xbox and PC next year, which will be slightly prettied up and have added cutscenes.

Watching the game at this stage shows some impressive AI work. You control a standard Army dismounted light infantry squad comprised of two teams, Alpha and

[above] While you issue orders to the squad leaders, they relay them with hand signals. [below] When under fire, soldiers will go prone on their own. [right] Facing is critical. You can individually control facing, but in many cases, the AI will get in the right position on its own. (All shots are from the Xbox version of the game.)







AVAILABLE EVERYWHERE NOW!

EMPIRE OF MAGIC™

ROLE PLAYING STRATEGY

Summitsoft entertainment

mayhem studios

PC CD ROM

TEEN T CONTENT RATED BY ESRB

Violence

WWW.SUMMITSOFT.NET

© 2003 Summitsoft Corporation. All Rights Reserved. Summitsoft, the Summitsoft logo and Empire of Magic are trademarks or registered trademarks of Summitsoft Corporation. Mayhem Studios and the Mayhem logo are trademarks of Mayhem Studios s.r.o. All other trademarks are the properties of their respective owners.

Bravo. You issue orders to the squad leaders, who then relay them to the team. Soldiers only hold their weapons upright when their forward-fire sector isn't blocked by another soldier; if someone's standing in the way, they lower the weapon. Players also need to be conscious of facings, so soldiers can keep from being flanked by the enemy. When you move soldiers, the cursor is context-sensitive and changes depending on the proximity to, say, a wall. While moving, the soldiers actively search for enemies. You give general fire orders as opposed to actually targeting enemies, and you need to follow real-world Rules of Engagement (as in, you can't run around with guns ablaze). Combat is about staying on the move and using the terrain. "You always want to move from concealment to concealment, from cover to cover," says William Stahl, the project's lead.

Originally demonstrated on the Xbox, the game is currently optimized for its controller, and the controls for the PC version are up the air. While it will have Internet multiplayer support on Xbox, THQ hasn't said (yet) what else will be different between the versions, though the company did note they hope to include some "exclusive" content. *—Steve Bauman*

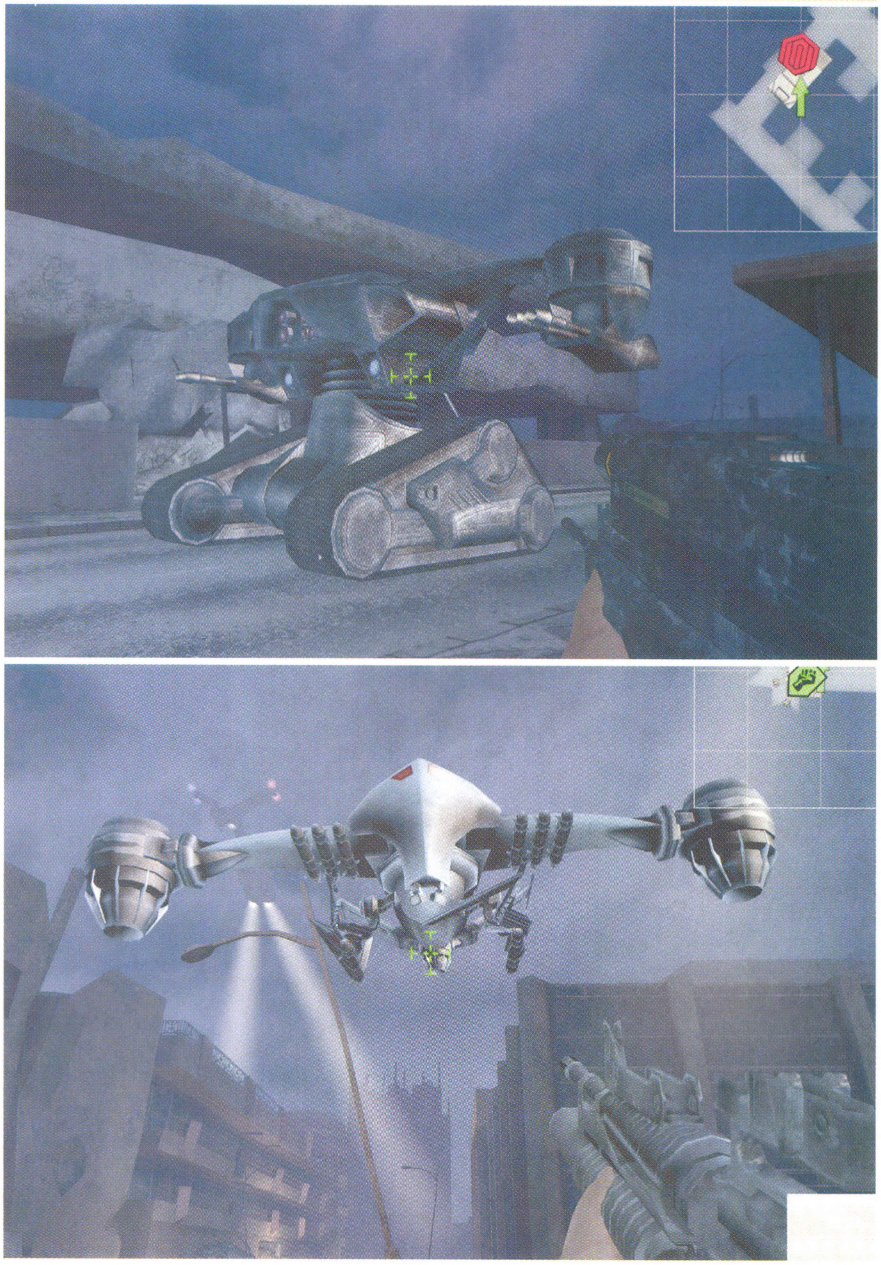
Terminator 3: War of the Machines

DEVELOPER Clever's Games
PUBLISHER Atari
RELEASE DATE November 2003

YES, WAR OF THE MACHINES is essentially "Battlefield 2042: Terminator." It's humans versus the machines, with 32-player Internet play, lots of vehicles, different maps set in all sorts of post-nuclear worlds (a ruined ocean harbor, devastated highways, Tech Com and SkyNet bases, crumbling factories, downtown Los Angeles—presumably in the future—etc.), and is scheduled for release in November. (Bet on 2004.)

If the concept is rather obvious, it's certainly a setting that's ripe for an interesting game. Humans and machines have eight different classes, and while people get to drive 15-20 vehicles, some of the machine units are flying vehicles. You get the standard human classes that are part of the Tech Com Special Forces such as scouts, supply crewmen, hunters, and heavy hunters, but the machines of SkyNet get cool T900a Infiltrators (like Arnie in the movies), T900 Endoskeletons, Exoskeletons, plus tanks and hovercraft units. The game types will include your standard mix of attack and defend, objective-based missions, plus deathmatch. They also plan on releasing mod tools.

One difference between *Battlefield 1942* and *War of the Machines* is what appears to be a more developed single-player game. While the multiplayer was the only part of the game demonstrated, the single-player includes a storyline where you either play a Tech Com soldier or the Terminator itself, with voicework from Schwarzenegger. After Bethesda's games from the early and mid-90s (*SkyNet*, incidentally, was the first shooter to implement mouselook), you knew it was only a matter of time until the Terminator came back.
—Steve Bauman



A human takes on one of the SkyNet tanks; Targeting one of SkyNet's finest airborne units.

From Ensemble Studios,
the creators of Age of Empires.®
AGE of MYTHOLOGY®
the TITANS
EXPANSION
A new chapter in battle. A new danger emerges.

Age of Mythology – The Titans is your next great conquest. Utilize the enormous Titans, promote units to heroes, and reuse god powers to lead the Atlanteans to global domination. Embark on a brand new single-player campaign and call on 12 new god powers to lift the Atlanteans to supremacy. Harness and wield the force of 10 new mythological units so that the sun may never set on the Atlantis empire. The battle for heaven and earth continues.

Microsoft game studios
ENSEMBLE STUDIOS
www.ageofmythology.com

RATING PENDING RP CONTENT RATED BY ESRB
Visit www.esrb.org
or call 1-800-771-3772
for more info.

©2003 Microsoft Corporation. All rights reserved. Microsoft, the Microsoft Game Studios logo, Age of Mythology, Age of Empires and Ensemble Studios are either registered trademarks or trademarks of Microsoft Corporation in the United States and/or other countries.

Sequel to PC Gamer's

Command the fleet that stands between your Homeworld and the enemy that would destroy it.

Control nimble fighters, massive destroyers, and the rest of your battle-ready fleet.

Improved controls make it easy to give orders and watch battles unfold.

Combine units into strike groups that work together to combat the enemy.

Go online for intense multi-player action with up to 6 people.

© 2003 Sierra Entertainment, Inc. All Rights Reserved. Homeworld is a registered trademark and Sierra, and the Sierra logo are trademarks of Sierra Entertainment, Inc. Vivendi Universal Games and the Vivendi Universal Games Logo are trademarks of Vivendi Universal Games, Inc. Relic and the Relic logo are trademarks of Relic Entertainment, Inc. All Rights Reserved. All other trademarks are property of their respective owners.

"Game of the Year"
SIERRA
HOMEWORLD2
PC
SIERRA
relic

A century ago, you led the Hiigarans home. Now, a deadly new enemy threatens all you've fought to create. Build vast fleets and repel aggressors, while exploring the cosmos for secrets to your survival. With intelligent ship formations, unparalleled special effects and an improved interface, this sequel to 1999's Game of the Year will once again set the standard for 3D space strategy games.

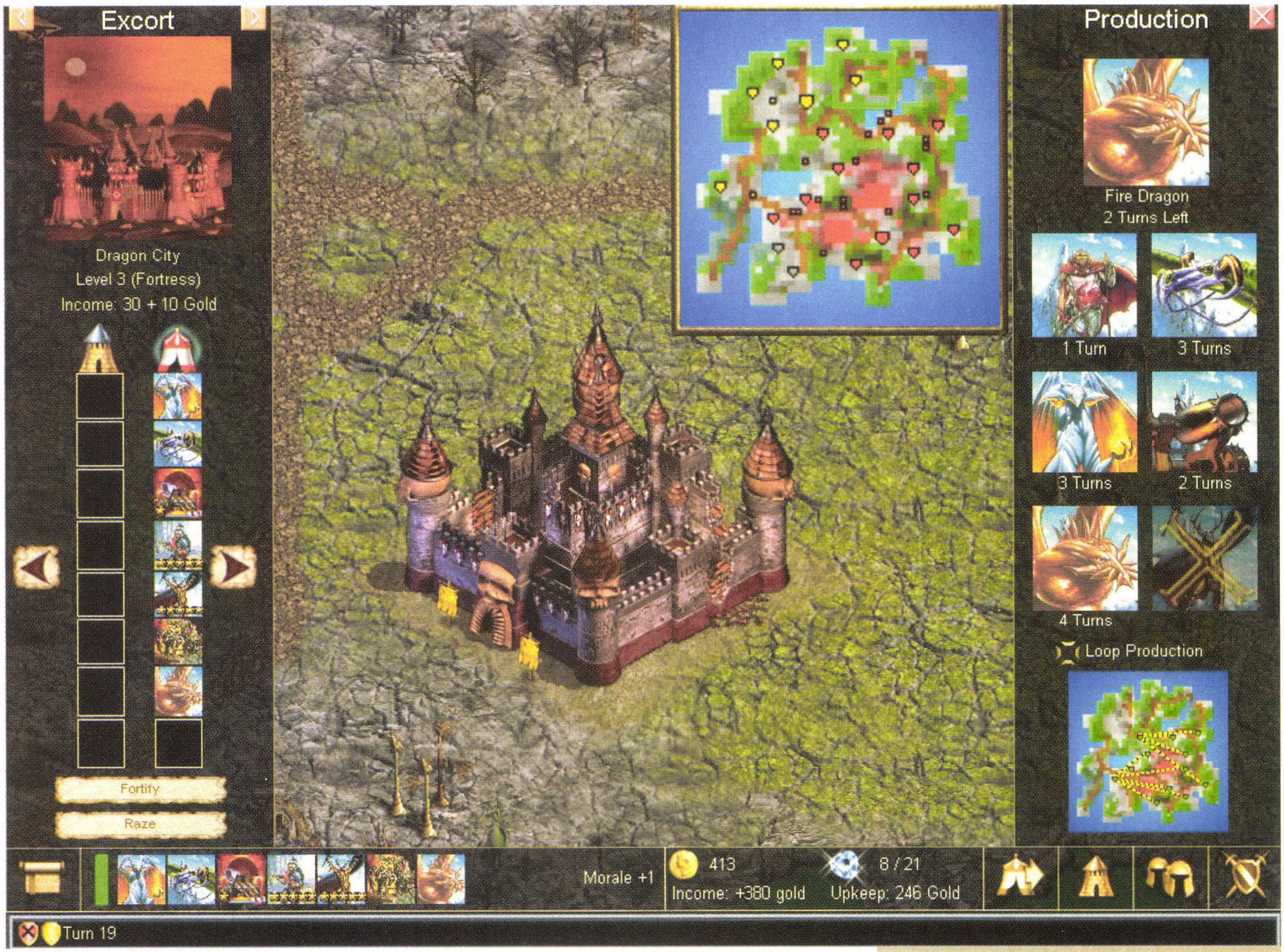
TEEN
T
CONTENT RATED BY
ESRB
Violence

VIVENDI UNIVERSAL games
PC CD-ROM SOFTWARE
ALIENWARE
relic ENTERTAINMENT

HOMEWORLD2

Space. Strategy. Survival.

www.homeworld2.com



Here there be dragons.

Warlords IV

DEVELOPER Infinite Interactive
PUBLISHER Ubi Soft
RELEASE DATE Fourth Quarter, 2003

SSG'S *WARLORDS* IS probably the father of fantasy strategy games. Released in 1990, it predated *Master of Magic* and *Heroes of Might and Magic* by five years. It established the basic tenets of the genre: you control cities in which you train fantastic creatures, which are then stacked into armies led by heroes with unique abilities and magic items. You move these stacks around a strategic map to conquer more cities. This has been the core of turn-based fantasy ever since, with *Age of Wonders* and *Disciples II* being the latest games to draw from the *Warlords* formula.

Although the *Warlords* franchise has most recently been used in SSG's real-time strategy games, it isn't out of the turn-based running just yet. Ubi Soft will publish *Warlords IV* this holiday season, but SSG's name won't be on the box. The developer split into two halves, with the SSG name being used for the company's historical wargames and the new name, Infinite Interactive, going to the guys who have been working on the *Warlords* series.

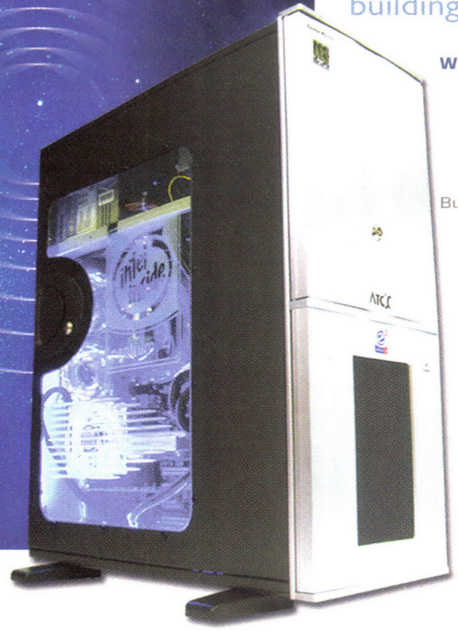
Warlords IV isn't very heavy on eye candy but it stays true to the conventions of the series. Over the course of its development, however, there has been some back-and-forth about combat. Many fans of the series felt strongly about its original model, in which battles played out quickly on the strategic map rather than breaking down into a tactical subgame like the *Heroes* and *Age of Wonders* series'. Although it seemed at one point as if *Warlords IV* would adopt a similar model, Infinite Interactive has finalized a combat system very similar to the original *Warlords*, but this time, the player has some control over the action.

Battles play out as a quick series of one-on-one combats not unlike a card game. The stack of units and heroes you bring into battle is like your hand, and each unit is like a card. At the beginning of the battle, the attacker lays down a unit. The defender then lays down one of his units. The two units fight until one dies, and then the loser plays a new unit. There's no retreating, so this goes on until one side has been wiped out.

The order of play can be very important. Say there's a dragon and some assassins in your opponent's stack, but you have to play your unit first. Do you put out your hero with a dragonslayer sword to deter the dragon, risking the hero's death from assassins, each of which has a 10% chance

Look Inside

building the best systems since 1990



What is considered to be a great gaming computer?

Is it its cool case?
Is it its slim monitor?
Is it its sleek speakers?
Well... that would be good.

But to be **GREAT**, it's what is **inside that counts!**

Q: What about performance?

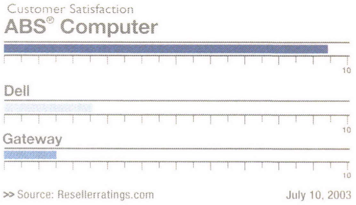
A: "Blistering performance." "A fantastic system for games." -- *Rich Brown, CNET.com*

Q: What about service?

A: "ABS was the only national PC vendor to earn a rating of Good for service in our latest reader survey." -- *Mick Lockey, PC World*

Powered by powerful Intel® Pentium® 4 processor with Hyper-Threading technology.

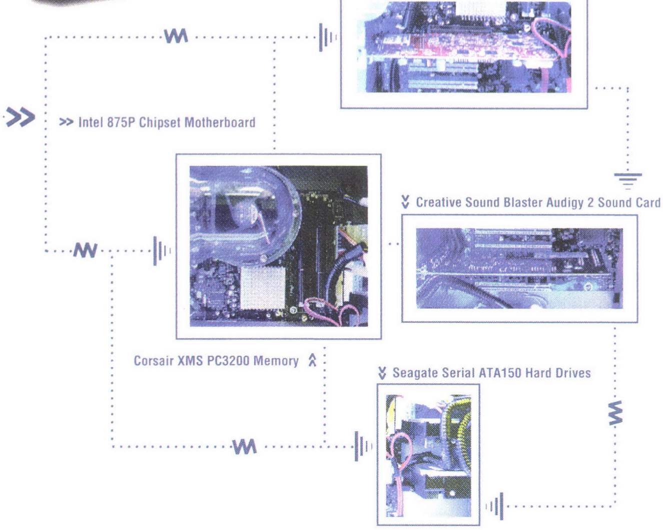
ABS® Ultimate Gaming systems are the overwhelming choice to power the hottest new games and transform your personal PCs into high-speed professional gaming machines.



>> Source: Resellerratings.com July 10, 2003

If you are contemplating buying a PC, go with ABS. You will find out that there is a company out there provides blazing PCs at cheap prices and they still refer to you by your name rather than a number!

-- A. Shaykh from Kalamazoo, Michigan



ATI RADEON 9800 PRO Video Card
>> Intel 875P Chipset Motherboard
Creative Sound Blaster Audigy 2 Sound Card
Corsair XMS PC3200 Memory
Seagate Serial ATA150 Hard Drives

ABS® Ultimate X5

- CoolerMaster Case w/Acrylic Windows and 400-Watt PS & Neon Light
- >> **New Intel 875P Chipset Motherboard w/800MHz FSB & USB 2.0**
- Corsair XMS 512MB PC3200 Dual-Channel DDR SDRAM Memory
- >> **Two Seagate 80GB 7200RPM Serial ATA150 Hard Drives w/8MB Cache**
- Pioneer 16X DVD Player
- >> **New ATI RADEON 9800 PRO 128MB 8X AGP Video Card w/TV-Out & DVI**
- Creative Labs Sound Blaster Audigy 2 Sound Card w/IEEE 1394
- Microsoft Wireless Optical Desktop Keyboard and Mouse
- Microsoft Windows® XP Home Edition
- Free Games: Microsoft Age of Empires II and Delta Force: Black Hawk Down
- Free Software: Microsoft Works 7.0
- Free 1 Year Onsite Service with 24/7 Technical Support
- Free ABS® PC Organizer (3" Color Binder for Manual, Drivers, etc.)
- Add NEC 22" .25mm 1920x1440 Color Monitor @ $549

Intel® Pentium® 4 Processor with HT Technology at 3.0GHz w/800MHz FSB

$1999

Power up your X5

Elevate your gaming experience to the highest level

Intel® Pentium® 4 Processor with HT Technology at 3.2GHz w/800MHz FSB
Corsair XMS 1GB PC3200 Dual-Channel DDR SDRAM
New ATI RADEON 9800 PRO 256MB 8X AGP Video Card w/TV-Out & DVI
Pioneer A05 DVD-R / RW Drive
Logitech Z-680 5.1 THX 6-Piece Speaker System

$2899

ABS® PCs use genuine Microsoft® Windows®
www.microsoft.com/piracy/howtotell

ABS® recommends Microsoft® Windows® XP

ABS®

www.abspc.com/4game | **800.876.8088**

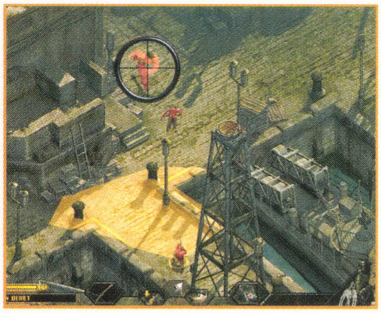
▸1 Year Limited Parts Warranty ▸Lifetime Labor Warranty ▸Lifetime Toll-Free Tech Support ▸30 Days Money Back Guarantee
▸▸Sales Hours: Mon-Fri 8:30AM-5:30PM PST ▸▸Technical Support: Mon-Fri 8:30AM-5:30PM PST

Price, specification, and terms are subject to change without notice. Picture shown with upgraded options. ABS® is not responsible for errors in typography and/or photography. 30 days money back guarantee does not include opened software, parts, or special orders merchandise. Original shipping and handling fee along with return shipping charge are non-refundable. Products returned after 30 days or in a non-refundable condition are subject to a restocking fee. Intel, Intel Inside, and Pentium are trademarks or registered trademarks of Intel Corporation or its subsidiaries in the United States and other countries.

quick takes

JOINT OPERATIONS

Think "Battlefield: Black Hawk Down." NovaLogic's multiplayer-focused tactical shooter is set in Indonesia, where you can play as either a member of the Joint Operations Force or an Indonesian Separatist. A single-player training mode preps you for the online action, complete with amphibious vehicles and cargo choppers. [NovaLogic]

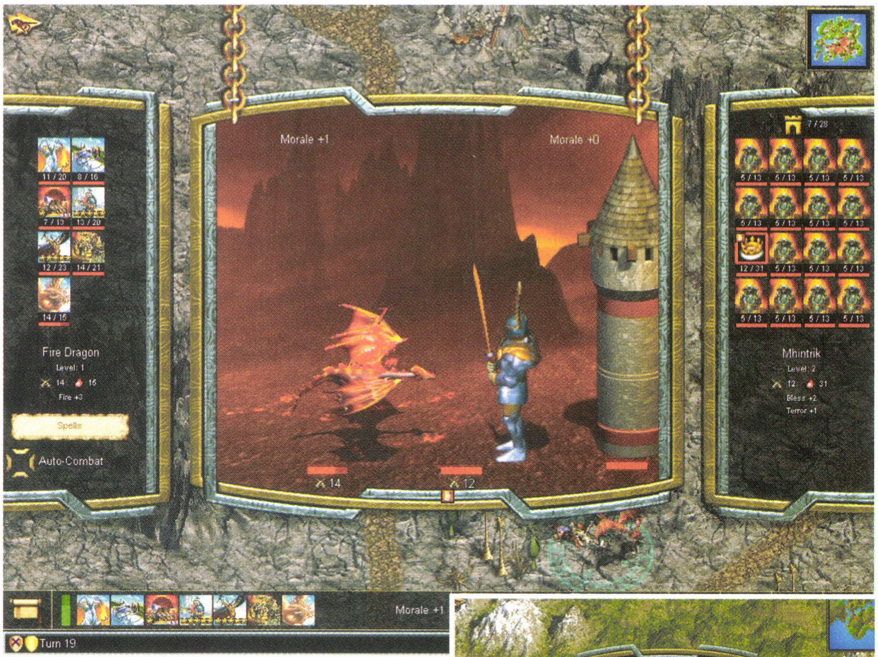


COMMANDOS 3

Though the first two were solitary affairs, Pyro Studios is making multiplayer a big part of its third *Commandos* title. Standard modes like deathmatch and CTF apply, as well as a nice competitive game where players use points to buy specialized soldiers. Cooperative play through the campaign missions should be much more entertaining now that all commandos can use a variety of weapons.[Eidos]

FINAL FANTASY XI

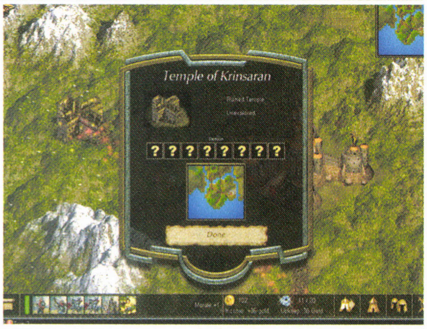
Square's legions of devoted fans are getting set to go online. Already up and running in Japan, this cross-platform—PS2 and PC—massively-multiplayer role-playing game blends the distinctive Square style and content with the tried and true elements of games like *EverQuest*. [Square Enix USA]

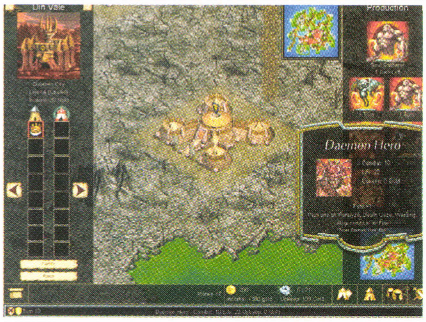


to outright kill any unit? Or do you hedge your bets and wait until the dragon is in play, throwing out some cheaper units first?

Some units have an effect without being played. For instance, any archers in a stack have a chance of attacking and damaging each enemy unit as it's played. An imp's taunt ability might draw out the weakest creature, overriding your opponent's choice of unit. Healers can restore some of a victor's hit points before he goes on to fight the next unit. A hero's leadership skill will directly improve the combat value of all units in the stack while that hero's alive. Since stacks are limited to eight units, deciding which units to put into your stacks is a crucial part of *Warlords IV*. As you conquer new cities and unlock new races, your choices increase exponentially. Individual units can gain experience that will improve their unique abilities.

One of the innovations in *Warlords IV* is a magic system that allows you to cast spells before you play your first unit in a battle. There are also spells that can be cast on the strategic map to summon units or change elements of the game. Your choice of spells is determined by the class of your main hero, who is persistent from game to game. As in the *Warlords Battlecry* series, you can use him in any combination of multiplayer, skirmish, and campaign games, earning new abilities and bonuses as he gains expereince. He can also keep a retinue of powerful units that he can bring into battle.





[from top] I'll see your Red Dragon and raise you a Warlord; Who knows what evil lurks in the Temple of Krinsaran; The daemon city lets you recruit elves. Just kidding. Here you recruit daemons.

With these role-playing elements from *Battlecry*, and the new combat system, *Warlords IV* advances the series into its thirteenth year. And while it may not live up to the complexity and graphics of its competition, it should satisfy anyone who misses SSG's trademark streamlined gameplay. *—Tom Chick*

DESCEND INTO THE DEPTHS OF NORRATH

EVERQUEST®

LOST DUNGEONS OF NORRATH™

FALL 2003

www.lostdungeonsofnorrath.com

RATING PENDING
RP
CONTENT RATED BY ESRB

Visit www.esrb.org or call 1-800-771-3772 for Rating Information.

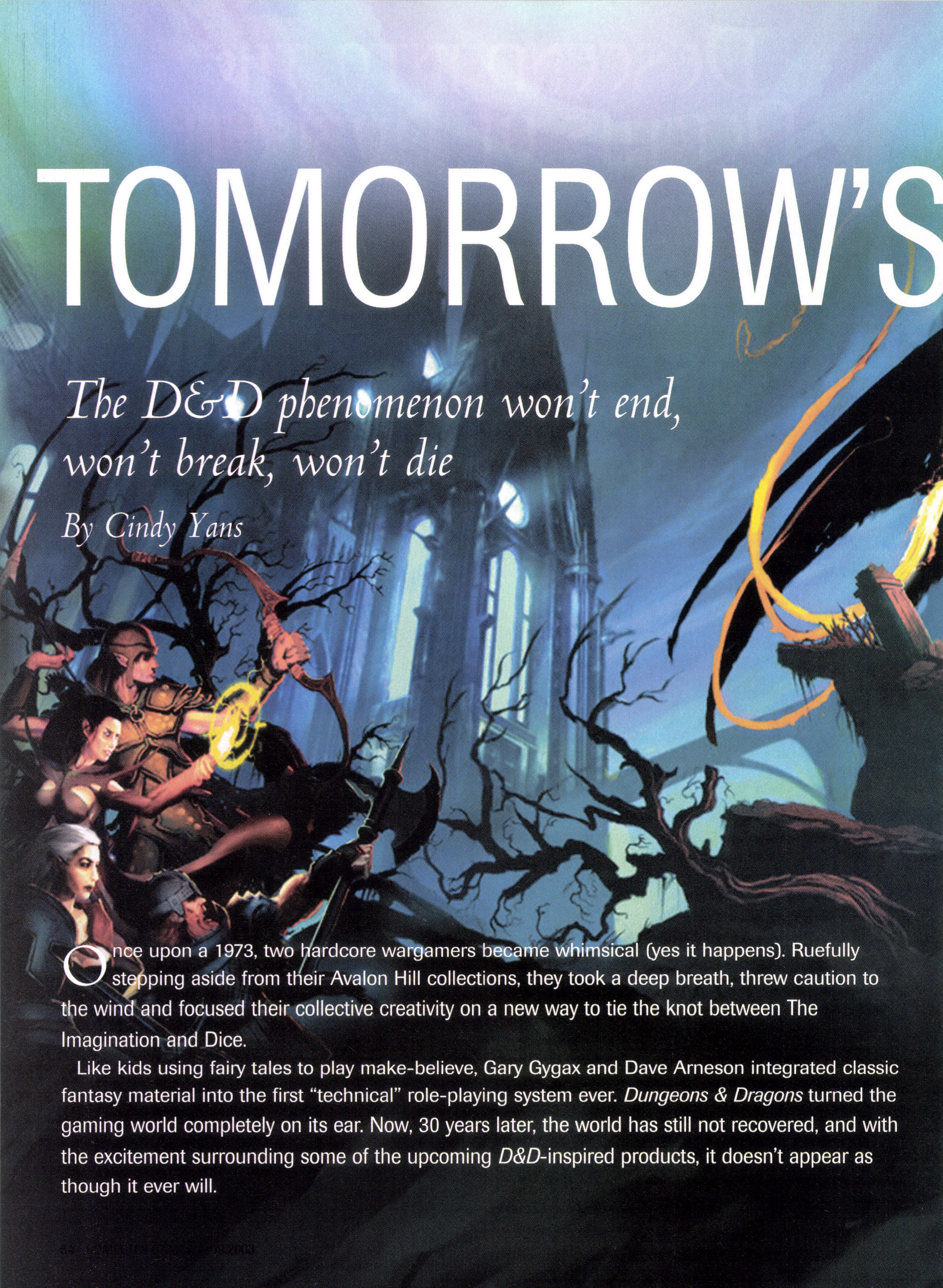
PC CD ROM

INTERNET CONNECTION REQUIRED
ADDITIONAL SUBSCRIPTION FEES REQUIRED

3D ACCELERATOR REQUIRED

SOE®
SONY ONLINE ENTERTAINMENT

© 2003 Sony Computer Entertainment America Inc. EverQuest is a registered trademark and Lost Dungeons of Norrath is a trademark of Sony Computer Entertainment America Inc. SOE and the SOE logo are registered trademarks of Sony Online Entertainment Inc. The ratings icon is a registered trademark of the Interactive Digital Software Association. All other trademarks are properties of their respective owners. All rights reserved.



TOMORROW'S

The D&D phenomenon won't end, won't break, won't die

By Cindy Yans

Once upon a 1973, two hardcore wargamers became whimsical (yes it happens). Ruefully stepping aside from their Avalon Hill collections, they took a deep breath, threw caution to the wind and focused their collective creativity on a new way to tie the knot between The Imagination and Dice.

Like kids using fairy tales to play make-believe, Gary Gygax and Dave Arneson integrated classic fantasy material into the first "technical" role-playing system ever. *Dungeons & Dragons* turned the gaming world completely on its ear. Now, 30 years later, the world has still not recovered, and with the excitement surrounding some of the upcoming *D&D*-inspired products, it doesn't appear as though it ever will.

DUNGEONS

GREYHAWK REVISITED

The Temple of Elemental Evil: yesterday's setting, today's rules, tomorrow's legends

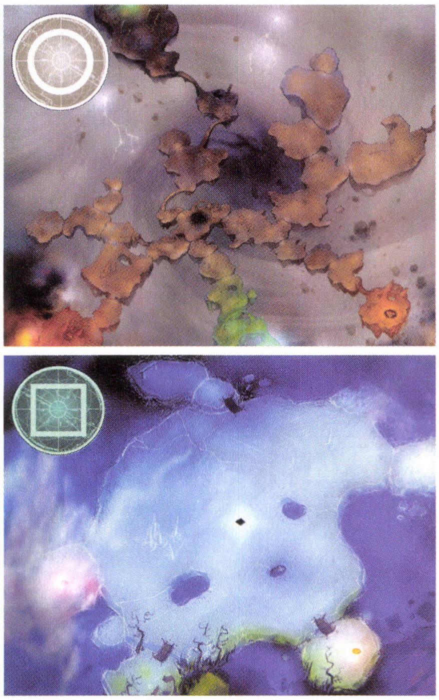
Tim Cain, the father of the successful *Fallout* series of role-playing games and founder of Troika Studios, might be the only known game developer to achieve the state of "truly perky" before 11AM. Walking into the offices of Troika Studios, which is right across the street from Cain's former stomping ground Interplay, there was Cain, smiling broadly, all decked-out in a Troika bowling shirt. He and his colleagues, Producer Tom Decker and Art Director Mike McCarthy (who were not similarly decked-out), were eager to demonstrate their latest endeavor, *Dungeons & Dragons: The Temple of Elemental Evil*, so of course, the first extremely pertinent question had to be: "Do you bowl?"

"Not well and not recently," Cain replies. "Before the company got bowling shirts, though, I told them I wanted to start a little bowling… thing," Decker says. "Yeah let's do it!" When the conversation began to deteriorate steadily from bowling to WhirlyBall, it was time to get *Evil*. On the wall is a huge countdown clock, the digital milliseconds spinning like mad. "We have 51 days left," says Cain, "and that's when we deliver our final."

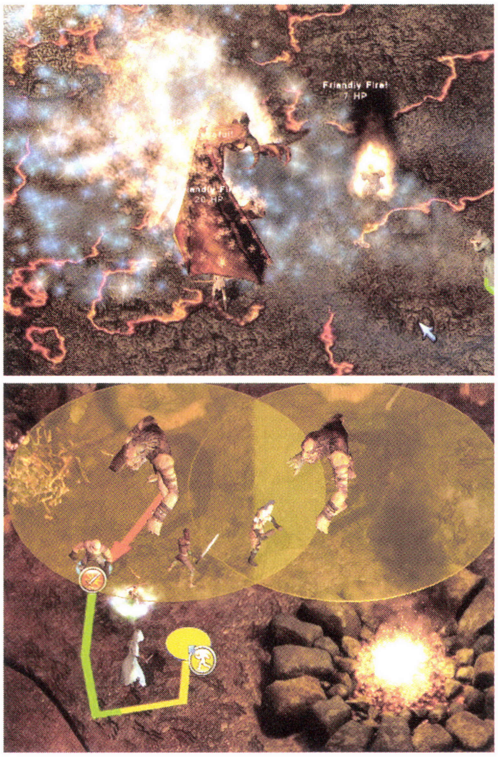
RAISING THE TEMPLE

This game is based upon a pen-and-paper campaign produced years after *D&D* players had been introduced to the Greyhawk world, set in a land called the Flanaess, an eastern peninsula on a vast continent called Oerik (OH-rik), on a world known as Oerth. The story is centered around the small village of Hommlet, the filthy shire of Nulb, the ruins of the Temple of Elemental Evil, and especially what lies beneath it. Created by Gary Gygax, "The Temple of Elemental Evil" was the first commercially-produced *AD&D* module from TSR. It was remade and novelized, but, until now, no computer games have employed the Greyhawk setting. "He wrote it in 1979," says Cain. "The copy I have is '82 or '85, and I played it in high school in '79 and '83."

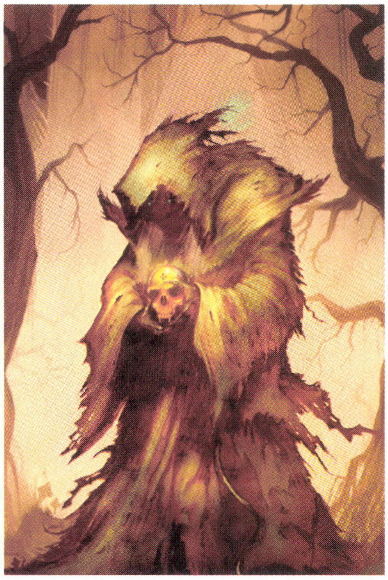
Even though the game's "mission" is to mirror the original module, Troika noticed a few inconsistencies. The original was edited down from 196 to 128 pages. There were extra levels and extra creatures, all of which are under consideration for inclusion in a sequel. "[Gygax] called me on my cell phone and said, 'God, if I had known that, we possibly could have made this one so



[above] Elemental Dungeons: Air & Water



[center top to bottom] Note how the brilliant spell effect bursts through and then blankets the fiery dungeon; Note that the chosen end node is not available during the current turn.
[below] Zuggtmoy-Crone-Form.



that it hinted at the [extra material], and then if we did an expansion we could have added the lower levels and stuff like that,'" says Cain. "I sent him a lot of questions about the module. Because it got edited like that, there were things that were missing, and it didn't make sense, so I'm like, 'What is this symbol supposed to be?' There was a symbol in the beginning that never appeared again. Ever. And he answered all of it."

HALF A RULESET ONWARD

The Temple of Elemental Evil will use the new 3.5 Edition of the *D&D* ruleset. They didn't share their unreleased (at this writing) copies of the *Player's Handbook*, *DM's Guide*, and *Monster Manual*, but did share a few thoughts about how the new rules will affect gameplay. "The biggest differences I see in 3.5 are that the Ranger and Druid were made stronger, and Monks received some nice reworking as well," says Cain. "I like the little class touches, like Sorcerers at later levels being able to unlearn a spell and pick a new one. These changes really ameliorated the classes in lots of small ways."

Some of the classes have really changed. Rangers have been completely overhauled, and Barbarians received small enhancements, as have Druids, making them Cain's current class-of-choice. "One change made them the class I'm thinking about playing now… like, all the time," he says. "Now they can spontaneously cast as well, which is really great. [In place of any other spell], you can spontaneously cast Summon—which is a great spell—you don't always need it, but when you need it, you really need it. 'This monster's too powerful, let's get a few tigers in here… now!' And it's really cool."

If you were ever a Dungeon Master of yore, you might remember playing with your character sheet open, and you'd say to Player One: "Okay, what are you rolling right now?" He or she would say, "Hmmm… I have a plus two, but he's singing a bard song, so that's plus one, and then there's the poison…." Cain believes that the elimination of "partial actions" alleviates many of these sorts of things that hurt your brain.

"I remember when I was DM-ing, trying to reverse engineer the Grapple," he says. "Okay, here's the base attack for the monster but they've added strength into it, and something else, so I've gotta subtract that out so I can figure out what the real base is, so then I can figure out the new Grapple attack. Here's what [the 3.5 rules] did: 'Here's the monster. Here's its base attack. Here's its regular attack, and here's its Grapple attack,' if it does any of those. It just lifts it right out for you. It's much, much easier." McCarthy agrees. "Yeah, trying to figure out those Grapples was tough."

The new rules also eliminate some cumbersome spell names. There are no longer Invisibility and Improved Invisibility. Instead, any "greater" bonus is conveniently tabulated. They also add a lot of spells, such as a strength-buffing spell, and around 22 new feats.

"Diehard is a great feat," says McCarthy. It lets you go negative without going unconscious—so you can fire away until negative ten, at which point you fall over dead." "It's like getting ten extra hit points," says Decker. "Paladins are good for that too—they can let themselves go negative and then 'Lay Hands' on themselves later."

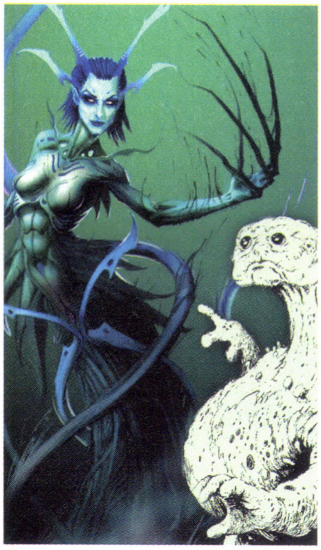
McCarthy looks at Cain. "Hey, what was that stupid party of yours?"

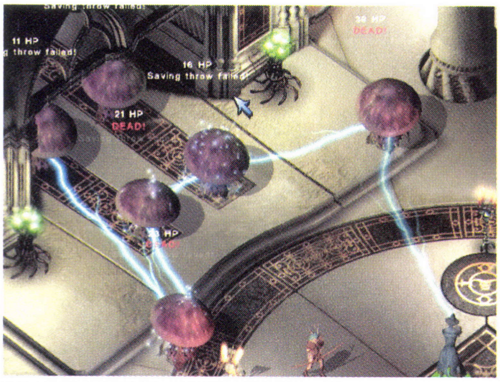
"Noooo, it was a good party," says Cain.

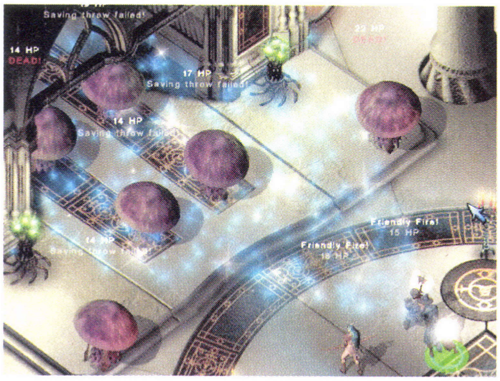
"Noooo. It was stupid." Then McCarthy remembers, and they say in unison: "Five Halfling Bard females." Cain laughs.

"If I can play through from start to finish with them, then anybody can play through."

They also mentioned someone's potential party of five female Barbarians wearing nothing but boots. You should probably take into account that these are people who put

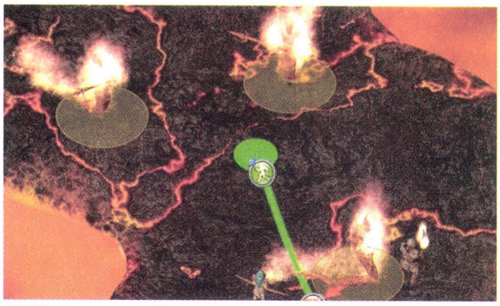



11 HP
throw failed!
16 HP
Saving throw failed!
21 HP
DEAD!
30 HP
DEAD!



[above] Zuggtmoy… now, and (gulp) then… [center] The original Zuggtmoy was rather "mushroom-like," so these must be some of her lavender followers before… and after they were zapped with Chain Lightning.

[below] The elemental dungeons are color coded… this one is obviously "Fire"; This particular area is a lower Temple level that is designed very differently from the rest, just so that when you reach it, you'll be, like, "Uh oh."



5 HP
Gargoyle
HP: 12/21
Initiative: 8

together an all-girl *EverQuest* party: Baby, Posh, Scary, Sporty, and Ginger—really.

FIGHT FOR YOUR RIGHT… TO PARTY

One of the biggest departures from standard *D&D* is the need to select a "party alignment." Troika uses this technique not only to constrain quest generation and to open up potential plot points, but also to constrain the alignment of potential party members. Characters you meet along the way will only be able to join your party if they pass the "Troika one degree of separation rule." It's kind of like blood typing. For example: Lawful Good can only accept Neutral Good, Lawful Neutral, and AB Positive, whereas a Chaotic Neutral party can host… oh, never mind, check out the Alignment Chart.

This whole alignment issue is key to how you're going to play through the game. Depending upon which you choose, the storyline will be quite different with quite a number of different endings. As in Troika's *Arcanum*, replayability should be huge. Since the original module isn't that linear to begin with, there is no definitive way to proceed, which made alignment-tailoring even easier. "To his credit, Gygax provided many ways into the temple, besides just walking to the front door," says Cain. "Even how you find out about it. And it also leaves a lot of things vague. There aren't parts that say 'Here's exactly how the party will find out where the temple is.' You might get some info from the temple agent, or find that this person knows where it is, but only really wants to tell good people… and these people know where it is, but they don't tell anyone. And then we threw in some stuff from Third Edition like 'Intimidate.' It makes for a lot of ways in, and a lot of plot paths." Most parties will probably end up killing the final nemesis, Zuggtmoy, who the game renders stunningly in shades of violet. In the original, though, she looks like a cross between ET and the Pillsbury Doughboy. But what about all of that dedication to reproducing the original? "Come on," says Cain. "You can't get all the way through the game and end up fighting something that looks like ET."

WHEN A DEMO GOES SIT-COM

They are using an existing game engine from *Arcanum*, with a lot of modifications, especially to the graphics engine on top of it. There are pre-rendered backgrounds with 3D objects drawn on top, and it runs at 800x600 by default, scalable up to 1280x1024. Load times are minimal, and the visuals look terrific, with detailed characters and monsters, and lush and richly textured environments. While Cain went home to retrieve his lonely dog, McCarthy and Decker provided a game demo that was largely a grand tour of the fabulous locations and a walkthrough of the combat system, but must have been, at least partly, lifted from an episode of *Three's Company*.

We were playing with a Barbarian and a Wizard. She was in deep trouble from the

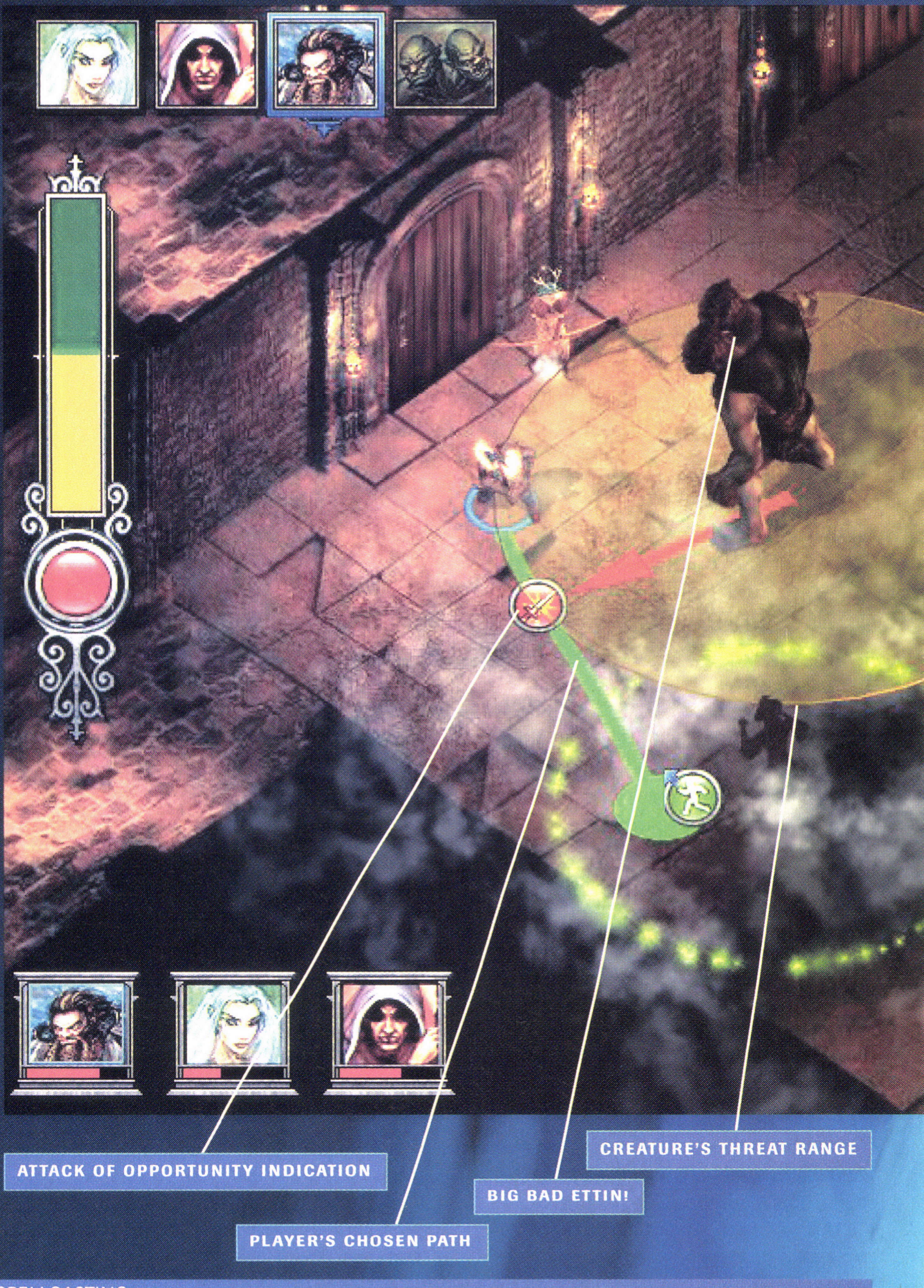
ALIGNMENT CHART

Whatever party alignment you choose, the only characters who can join you must be aligned, at most, one space away from yours, vertically, horizontally, or diagonally:

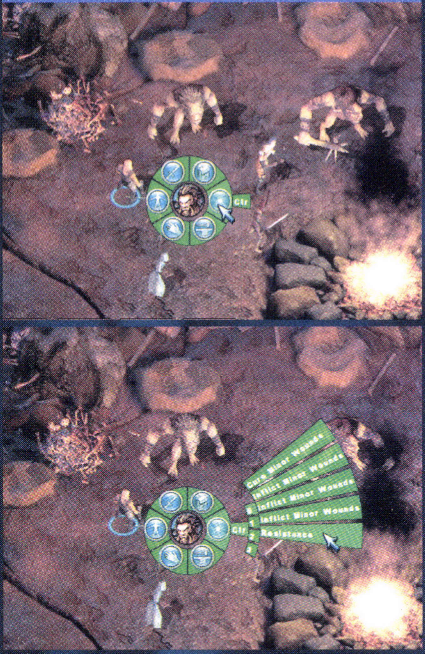
Lawful Good	Neutral Good	Chaotic Good
Lawful Neutral	Neutral	Chaotic Neutral
Lawful Evil	Neutral Evil	Chaotic Evil

Exception: the Paladin, the definitive Goody-Two-Shoes of D&D. Since he must always be Lawful Good, if you make a Lawful Neutral party and add a Paladin, you lose your ability to accept Lawful Evil characters, or if you add a Lawful Evil character, then you lose the ability to add Paladins.

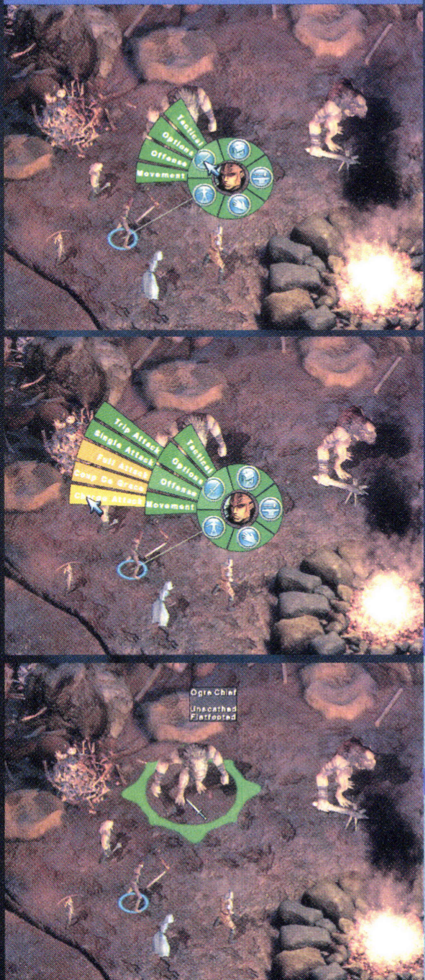
ANATOMY OF AN INTERFACE


ATTACK OF OPPORTUNITY INDICATION
PLAYER'S CHOSEN PATH
BIG BAD ETTIN!
CREATURE'S THREAT RANGE

SPELLCASTING


Cure Minor Wounds
Inflict Minor Wounds
Inflict Minor Wounds
Inflict Minor Wounds
Resistance

COMBAT SPECIAL ATTACKS

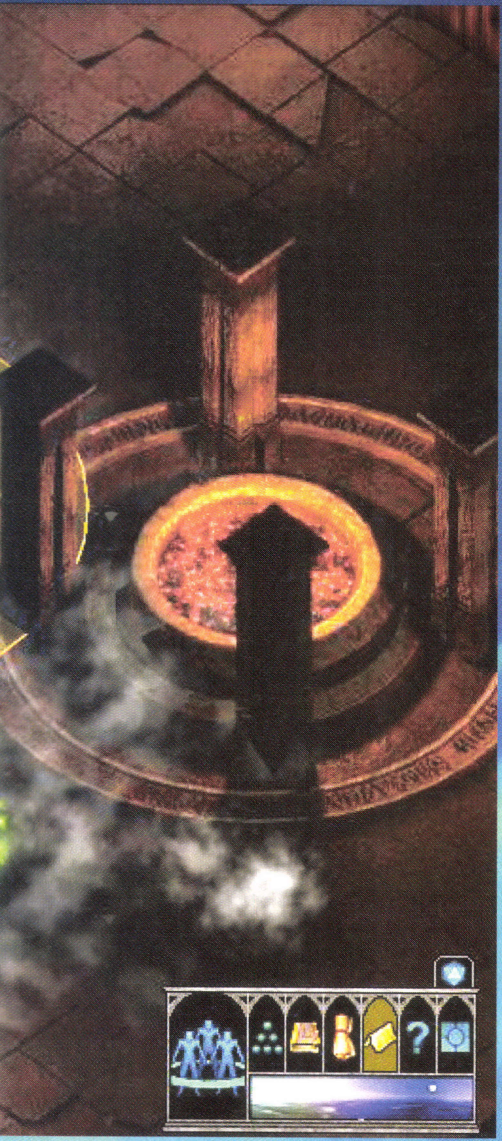

Tactical
Options
Offense
Movement
Trip Attack
Single Attack
Full Attack
Coup De Grace
Ogre Chief
Unscathed
Flatfooted

SPELLCASTING

Right click to open the radial menu: hovering over the "Spell" option pops up a tab for your character class only. Move the cursor over it to further expand the menu—initially showing your available spell levels, and then, when your cursor is over a level, it shows the available spells within that level. Choose one to cast.

COMBAT SPECIAL ATTACKS (ILLUSTRATES THE "CHARGE ATTACK")

Right click to open the radial menu: cursor over the combat sword icon. This allows you to choose Tactical, Options, Offense, or Movement. Cursor over Offense, which shows your available combat skills. Note the color differences. The entire radial menu is color coded to show how much time you will have AFTER an action. Green means that there's time for this and an additional action. Single Attack is green, indicating that you could perform it and then back away. Click on Charge Attack, which is a yellow Full-Round Action. This means that it's the last one you can do during your current turn. Finally, you get a sword cursor, which you will left-click on your target to Charge Attack it.



New and seasoned role-players will most likely find the Temple of Elemental Evil interface slick, accessible, and convenient in a design that's a cut above the norm. While radial menus are more or less standard in a number of RPGs, Troika offers them up with extraordinarily handy "expansions" to make each action-decision a snap. Also, true Rules Whores will be able to see in excruciating detail how each turn plays out according to the D&D 3.5 Edition ruleset. Everyone else who says: "I really just don't want to know… " can just leave that window shut.

get-go (you know the story with low-level Wizards). She's up. She's down. She's up! She's down! Score! That's one for the AI. Brutal. But now what? Decker and McCarthy discuss the matter:

McCarthy [trying to use a health potion]: "Does this work?"

Decker: "I think only from the radial menu right now. She's dead. She can't do it."

"She can't interact with anything from the radial menu? I don't think she's dead, is she?"

"She's dying, though, right?"

"Yeah."

"So she wouldn't be able to drink her own potion."

"Well, can I feed it to her? That's what we always used to do."

"See if the guy… if… hmmm… you may be able to target somebody after you select it, so try giving the healing potion to the guy. See if it comes up as a target… I think it will. You have to be within 'touch range.' So give that to….."

"He has 'em both."

"Okay, then… from his radial menu it should show. Ohhhh… they're not identified, that's what it is."

"Well can we rest?"

"No. You're in the dungeon. Just pass time."

"We can rest when we get to Hommlet… oh. Those doors didn't open."

[After many attempts at door-opening… ah, yes.]

"So [the Barbarian] is really dumb and he gets this dumb dialogue….."

Barbarian: "Me soon rich! Omelet, here we come."

[They journey to Omelet… er… Hommlet.]

When you transfer between maps, the dead people just kind of go with you. This is acceptable since, in the pen and paper game, you actually do the same thing—take the dead along to the next area. But wait, she's not dead, she's just dying.

Back at the Inn is Elmo, and he looks like he's three or four sheets to the wind. Unfortunately, Madam Wizard, the brains of the organization, is incapacitated, leaving Barbarian-the-Stupid to deal with Elmo-the-Inebriated. "Hi, hic… I'm Elmo! Hic."

"Hey Elbow. You funny, Elbow. Ha ha."

[They attempt to get Elmo to join the party]

McCarthy: "He's saying 'Go away.'"

Hastings, 1066:
English oil smithies incinerated invading forces with vats of flaming pitch.

This Fall,
it's your turn.

LIVING WIZARD

Gary Gygax on… all sorts of stuff

Bundling up a wargame and miniatures hobby and remolding it into a fantasy role-playing game he called *Dungeons & Dragons* was the first thing that really put E. Gary Gygax on the overhead map. A chess player at the age of six, this creative thinker probably learned more by cutting school on a regular basis to watch Ernie Kovacs on TV ("one of the greatest sight-gag guys that ever lived") than he did in the classroom. Now at age 65, he's still one of the most prolific generators of fantasy content. We managed to drag him away from his fourth re-reading of Jack Vance's *The Eyes of the Overworld*, and asked him to play a game of "stream of consciousness."

You've said that you don't know a whole lot about what Troika has done with The Temple of Elemental Evil because you haven't really had a chance to check it out, but as far as computer role-playing games in general, do you ever play them yourself?

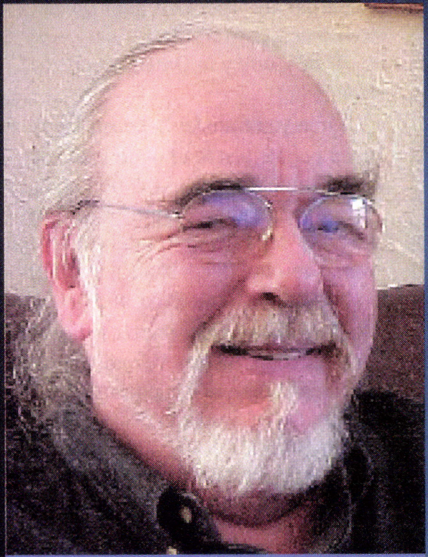
Well, if I do, then there goes a month or two. Any game that I like that is accessible, and that you can play on your own any time you feel like it, is bad news for me. I'm a real diehard gamer, so if I start, I won't quit. It's all I think about.

Does your wife game with you?

Well, she's not really a role-player, but we do play various board games. And cards: Bridge, Cribbage… I won't play Hearts with her, though. She's too good. She is *really* good. When she can "Shoot the Moon," like, five hands out of eight, it's…well, it's just really annoying. [He laughs] I do like to play Poker too, but only with friends. Then you don't really get the urge to squeeze money out of the other guys. It's more of a "token."

How about the kids? Are they gamers?

Well, yes and no. I have six kids, three sons and three daughters. And the girls used to game but have given it up. But the boys all play all kinds of games. My youngest son (17) is very much into online and computer games. I don't know what they're playing now, but for a long time it was *WarCraft III*–is that the one with the cow level? So I catch him up late at night and make him go to bed. "But Daaaaad, I've gotta saaaaave." "So save *now*," I tell him. And that's why I don't start playing. I really can't crack down on him too hard because I would do the same thing.



GARY GYGAX

What do you think of the D&D Edition 3.5 Ruleset?

Well, I've become a "Rules Lite" gamer, and actually I think that Third Edition lost the archetype and went to power-gaming short-term campaigns, where it was too rules-heavy and too focused on, you know, seek-and-destroy missions, and 3.5 is certainly going to be more of the same. But that's just about right, because they figure the average *D&D* campaign lasts two years, so it's about time they came out with a new version.

Is Temple of Elemental Evil is a good choice for translation to the computer?

Yes. Excellent. It ties up the village of Hommlet as your base. We shifted one of our groups to play there for a couple of years. It's just a marvelous time. And from what questions Troika asked about how to treat things, it looks like they are really going to have a product that is faithful to the paper game. He [Tim Cain] was saying to me, "Well, I figured this… " and "Is this right?" And I couldn't tell him anything except: "Well, yep… yep… yes, you've got it down. You sure know your stuff." And I was really looking forward to… I mean I got excited when I saw that they were thinking about the *Giant* series next, and I said: "Oh, boy. [Laughs] That'll be great."

Do you think the fact that Troika's story threads are based heavily on party alignment will make for too many through-lines that will "dilute" the original material?

Sure, it's going to make it different, but it's also going to offer a lot more variety. It's sort of like maybe different endings. Well, of course, I think there's too much stress put on alignment, because how the hell do you know except through their actions whether somebody is malign or benign, or caring or not? When I created alignments it was really just to help players to get into the role of their character, and the DM to kind of observe whether they were being the way they said they were… It wasn't like [laughs] "Yes! Hi! I'm Lawful Good!" or "Oh look! There's a fourth-level Ranger." Well how do you know he's a fourth-level Ranger? And that sort of silly stuff. I'm sure you've seen the, "Hey! Where's the Cheetos?" version of a *D&D* campaign [a parody of a night playing *D&D* created by Volition, developer of *Summoner*]. That's great. I've saved that, and I watch it every once in a while, because it's still hilarious. Ah yes… a "*D&D* Campaign Gone Wrong," like, you know, "Uh…Hello? It's OK to talk to each other now."

Decker: "Give Elmo some gold."

"I think we can get Elmo to follow us, right?"

"Give him the money."

"What do I say to get him in my party, Tom?"

"This should be pretty easy… let's see…."

"Yes it should be…."

"Ask him where… yeah! That first one… <click> uh… we need one more thing? <click>"

"We already did that one."

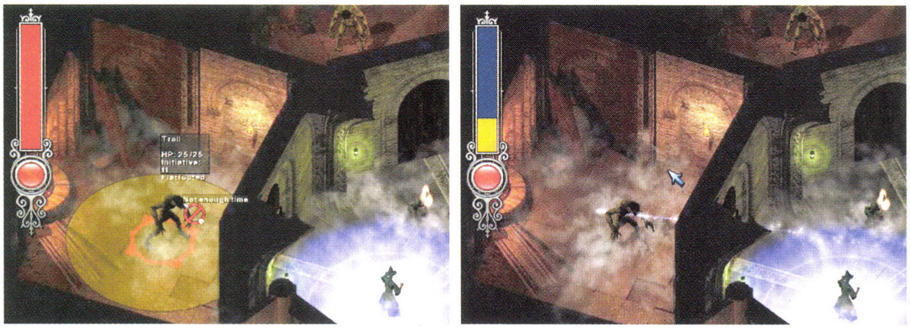
"Ask for the drinking place. <click> No. Keep going. Go back to that one. But that's the oldest one… that's weird….

"I think you've already 'popped out of the node….'"

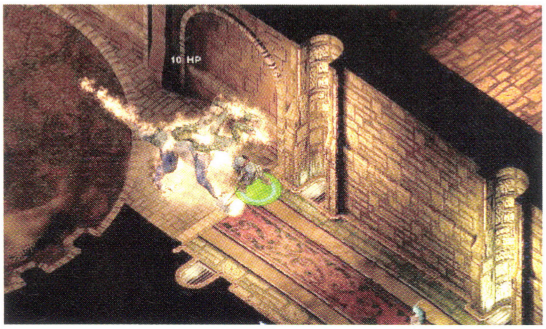
"Damn…."

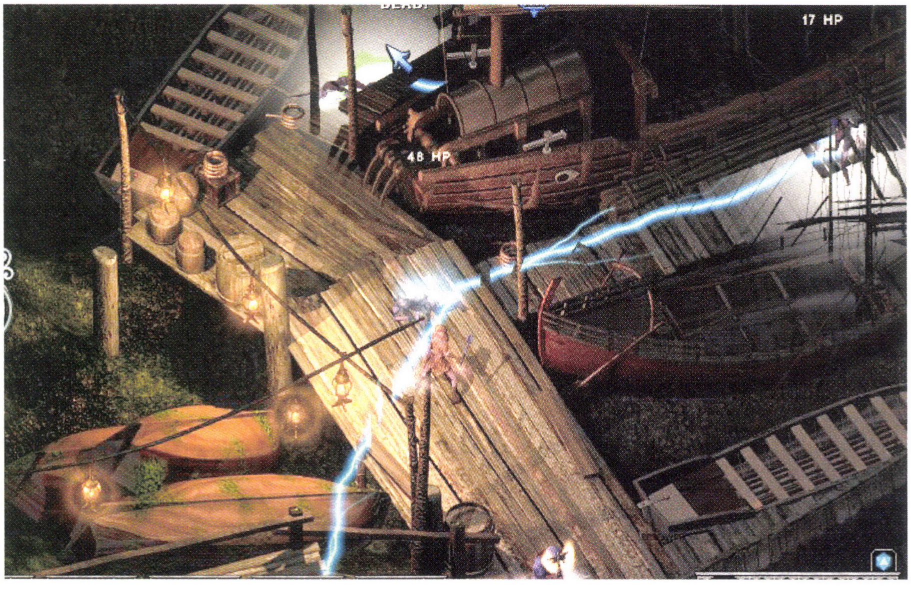
This is actually all in gentle fun, because a lot of love is going into this project, mostly because the developers are total *D&D* geeks, and proud of it. They admitted that they do indeed still play pen-and-paper. Avidly. You'd think that after a long day's work on *D&D*, the last thing they'd want to do is sit down and, er, play *D&D*. In fact, there are many campaigns going on at Troika.

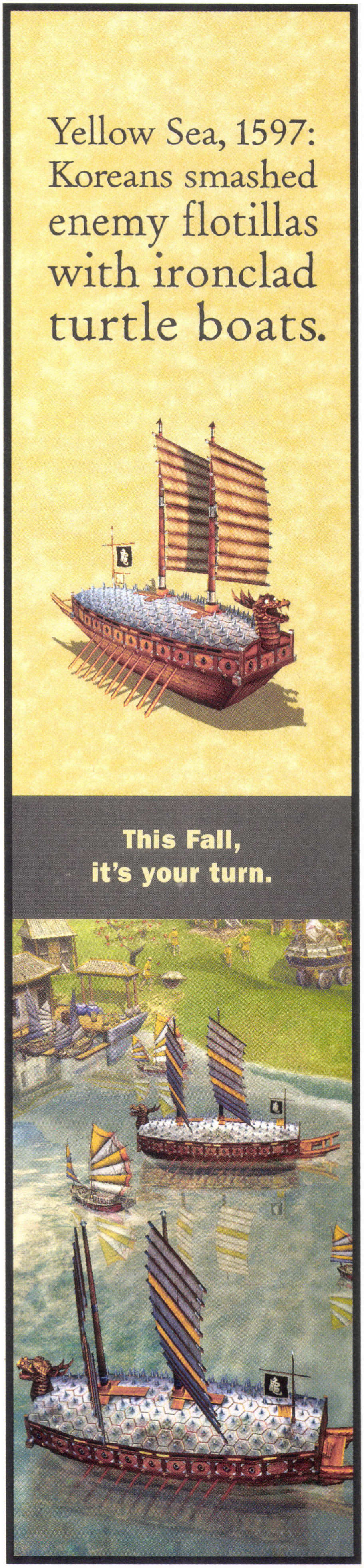
"But we stopped a few weeks ago," says Cain, "since we're all so involved in testing." He shakes his head and sighs wistfully, "But I think about my character… all the time." Yep, they're all completely obsessed. And in this case, that is very encouraging.



[above left to right] Even from the next room, magic is deadly—notice the health bar going from full to less than half, and the immolated roomful of monsters shouting: "ouch!" [right] The original maps contained many narrow corridors, so, by necessity, there are a lot of hallways in the game. [below] Chain spells are very powerful—check out the level-to-level and around-the-corner-ness of this one.






Yellow Sea, 1597: Koreans smashed enemy flotillas with ironclad turtle boats.

This Fall, it's your turn.

DUNGEONEERS OF THE FUTURE

The D&D license barely breaks stride as it hones the electronic dice-rolls of tomorrow

Dungeons & Dragons games date back a quarter century--before some of you were born, while some of you were bathing in Clearasil, and while others were buying stock in Clearasil–and their inevitable electronic evolution spans from 1988's *Pool of Radiance* to this year's *Shadows of Undrentide*. The magic (literally) of the *D&D* universe has provided seemingly endless inspiration for the sagas that have sprung from it, and those that will continue to spring. While the next year or so won't completely flood us with *D&D*-related games, there are still a notable few on the horizon.

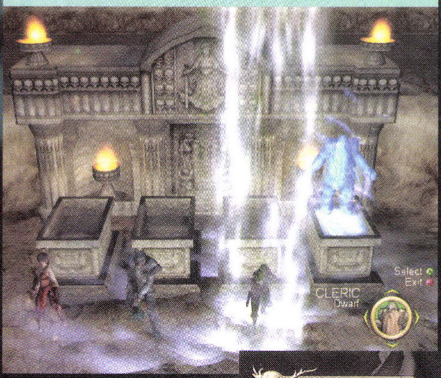
DUNGEONS AND DRAGONS: HEROES

ATARI: XBOX, PS2, GAMECUBE • FALL 2003

150 years ago, in the lost Kingdom of Baele, four heroes go up against the Dark Lord, Kaden. Although they succeed, by a stroke of bad luck they still end up in Hades. Years pass. Lonely for Kaden, some foul and vile creatures, hungry for power, are trying to bring him back. So, as is not surprising, the four heroes are resurrected to keep this from happening. And go figure… they are a fighter, a wizard, a cleric, and a rogue. Using the Third Edition *Dungeons & Dragons* ruleset, *Heroes* should play a lot like a cross between *Baldur's Gate: Dark Alliance*, and any *Diablo*-esque RPG.

Although *Dark Alliance* was set in the Forgotten Realms and *Temple of Elemental Evil* will utilize the Greyhawk universe, Heroes is creating its own fiction and backstory. It will, however, use traditional creatures from the Third Edition *D&D Monster Manual*. The game features a system in which you'll be able to upgrade your weapons with special effects, and to map your actions. A four-player cooperative mode will allow you to team up for a dungeon romp through seven environments, each of which is divided into three or four smaller areas. While the options here are somewhat limited, the simplicity should make for some very fast gameplay.

DUNGEONS AND DRAGONS: HEROES

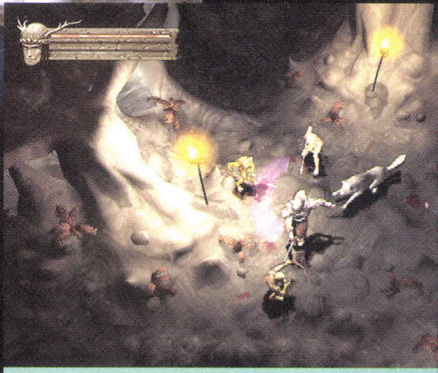


BALDUR'S GATE: DARK ALLIANCE II

INTERPLAY: XBOX, PS2 • FALL 2003

And speaking of *Baldur's Gate: Dark Alliance*, its sequel, developed by Black Isle Studios, uses the same engine and promises another combat-heavy RPG in the Forgotten Realms universe. The game begins right where its predecessor's cliffhanger dropped you, so if you're familiar with the first game you'll recognize quite a few elements here, but new players will find a self-contained, four act, 40 level storyline which the developers hope will be a bit "stronger," with side quests that really matter.

The most significant enhancement will be the newly-balanced, skill-specific, five-character roster including a human cleric, a dwarf fighter-thief, a moon elf necromancer, a human barbarian, and a drow monk (a drow monk? OK, if they say so…), the mixture of which they're hoping will really improve the cooperative game. Also, you'll be able to unlock new characters, much like the first title's surprise offering of Drizzt. There will be at least three that the developers say will astound Forgotten Realms fans, although it's tough to say how they could top ol' Drizzt.



BALDUR'S GATE: DARK ALLIANCE II

D&D ONLINE

ATARI: PC • 2005

Atari and Turbine Entertainment, developer of *Asheron's Call*, announced this May that they'll be bringing the latter's online game expertise to the table with *Dungeons & Dragons Online*. Wizards of the Coast's license puts one more notch in its belt as developers strive to create "the definitive online *Dungeons & Dragons* experience, complete with dramatic dungeon crawling, terrifying monster combat and challenging puzzles, character advancement, and guild-based power struggles." In ever-deepening dungeons, you (and your party) will be challenged to survive myriad traps, pitfalls, and *Monster Manual*™ creatures while engaging in real-time strategic combat that leaves no time for grabbing a quick lunch between battles.

Turbine believes that the game will be the only online experience that actually makes you feel as though you're playing your flesh and blood, er, pen-and-paper characters. And, like its second generation predecessors, it's trying to foster a greater sense of community. "When you play on a world with several thousand other people, you usually won't know the majority of the other characters that play there," says Turbine Lead Designer Ken Troop (as reported by Silven Crossroads). "Your actions and experiences in-game get lost in the churn of thousands of other players. We're making sure that *D&D Online* recreates that sense of a close-knit community. This is a world where you definitely won't be anonymous. The actions you take—and bonds you make—become very important." It'll be such a long time before this product even hopes to see the light of day… the genre might be going in an entirely different direction by then.

BALDUR'S GATE III

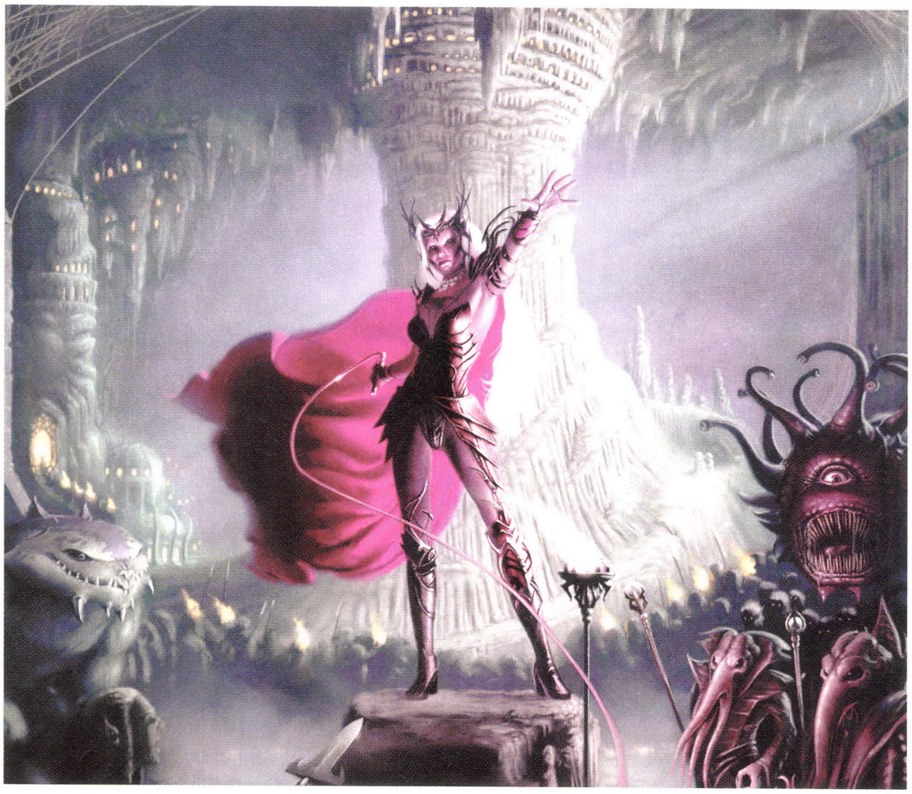
RUMORED, BUT WHO'S KIDDING WHOM? • SOMEDAY

Surely the *Baldur's Gate* series that became the definitive role-playing front-runner when it debuted in 2000 will not be retiring quietly into the night. The franchise spawned quite a number of sequels and add-ons, and there are nameless heralds predicting yet another follow-up in the works. The question remains, "when?" Actually, many questions remain, but there's no outing the Forgotten Realms before it cares to be outed.

SUBTERRANEAN HOMESICK BLUES

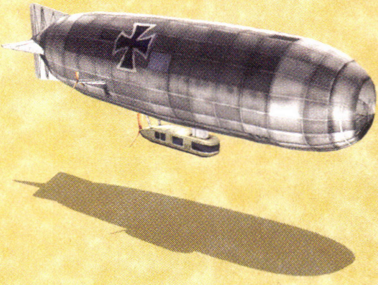
BioWare's Neverwinter Nights expansion Hordes of the Underdark gets down with the Drow

While the surface world of Faerun basks in the warm rays of the sun, caressed by the fresh breezes of spring and blanketed by the soft snows of winter, there is a place where the seasons never change, where perpetual gloom replaces sunshine and the only breezes come from the silent passage of dark armies, loathsome creatures, and the ever-present flatulence of Dwarves. This is the subterranean World-That-Lies-Beneath. It is the home of the Drow, the Dueregar, the Svirfneblin, and the Mind Flayers, a land of mysterious treasures and shadowy terrors. It is the Underdark, a place BioWare's Assistant Producer Darcy Pajak says is the most scary, foreboding, and dislocated place in all of the Forgotten Realms.



It's also the setting for BioWare's second official expansion for *Neverwinter Nights*. Like *Shadows of Undrentide*, it expands the roster of character classes, feats, and abilities, adds new monsters and items, and offers up a solid chunk of solo adventuring as well as a host of tools and tilesets for the game's Aurora editing and scripting system. Not since SSI's pallid *Menzoberranzan* has a game delved into the gray and purple depths in which such legendary figures as Drizzt Do'Urden originated. The fungus-covered, monster-infested Underdark makes for a great game set-

London, 1915:
Germans rained
destruction on
English foes
from Zeppelins.



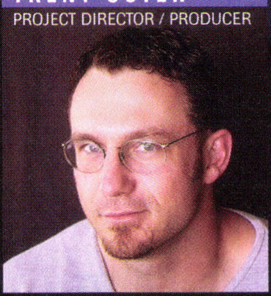
**This Fall,
it's your turn.**

ALTER EGOS

Underdark developers "tell all" about their surrogate selves

We asked several of BioWare's *Hordes of the Underdark* developers about the entities with which they vicariously adventure in the many lands of *Neverwinter Nights*, and the information reinforces the old saying, "it takes all kinds." Especially in the fantasy realm.

TRENT OSTER
PROJECT DIRECTOR / PRODUCER



GURBLUK

RACE AND CLASS **15th Level Half-Orc Barbarian**
ALIGNMENT **Chaotic Neutral**

I play Gurbluk as though he lacks any sense of subtlety. If anything moves he probably tries to kill it. Adventuring as Gurbluk is usually defined by taking a great deal of spell and trap damage early on, and relying heavily on damage reduction and Uncanny Dodge later on. After all, looking for traps would be a waste of time when you have no means of disarming them. The key to Gurbluk's survival is having an absolute boatload of hit points and high strength so he can quickly wipe out whatever the threat may be. His weapon focus (Greatsword) and Improved Critical lead to massive damage when he does get into melee.

GURBLUK IN HORDES OF UNDERDARK

I fully expect him to be completely decimated late in the adventure by the Mindflayers. He's hell on wheels when he gets going, but he just isn't that smart. As a result of his "shortcomings," his will saving throw is quite bad. I expect that any spellcasting enemies will make for a rough go of it.

GURBLUK EXPANDED

I've played Gurbluk in one iteration or another in just about every RPG I've played. Gurbluk was a 13th level Shadow Knight in *EverQuest* before I became too busy working on *Neverwinter Nights*. He has also made appearances in *Ultima Online*, *Dark Age of Camelot*, and I plan to bring him into our own *Star Wars: Knights of the Old Republic* in some fashion (I think he's going to be a Wookiee this time around). I count on him to take the hits, shrug off the damage, and get the job done. So far in his illustrious past he hasn't let me down. (He's died about a thousand times, but he's never let me down.)

GURBLUK

BRENT KNOWLES
LEAD DESIGNER

ISIOLIA ENGLEFENT

RACE AND CLASS **Elven Druid Level**
ALIGNMENT **Neutral Evil**

Isiolia has dedicated herself to the protection of nature at all costs. After meeting a mysterious ranger in the woods outside the town of Hilltop, she learned that he was an Arcane Archer. Excited by the possibility of expanding her powers so that she could more effectively put a stop to the defilers of nature, she gained a couple Wizard levels and after that became an Arcane Archer herself. She has an interesting range of abilities, such as Druid spells, Wizard spells, and the awesome Arcane Archer special abilities.

ISIOLIA IN HORDES OF UNDERDARK

Isiolia despises the Drow, for they are the twisted cousins of her own people. Though morally she is an evil person, she cannot abide the Drow's constant lack of respect for the woodlands. She eagerly looks forward to cleansing the Underdark of the Drow vermin and freeing any wild critters that she might come across. As a Druid, she looks forward to speaking with all the mysterious creatures that she might discover in the Underdark, which is host to many kinds of animals that are seldom seen on the surface. She hopes to find some powerful animal allies to help her overcome the Drow.

ISIOLIA EXPANDED

Even though I'll be playing through the game as Isiolia, I think I'll still try out a couple new character class combinations. I'm especially interested in a couple of the very cool new prestige classes that *Hordes* will be offering. I think I'll try out a Dwarf Warrior since there's a prestige class in the works that will be just perfect for him. Being that this Dwarf will be traveling to the Underdark, a land of stone and steel, he will be certain to find much to his liking. And those things that displease him, he will smash into shape.

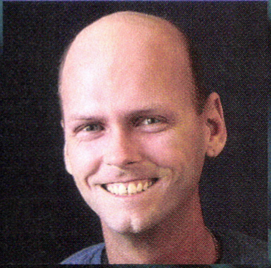
ISIOLIA ENGLEFENT

---

ting, especially now that there's a gaming system and engine capable of doing the environment justice. The Underdark is a vast expanse of caverns and caves, both natural and creature-made, which function as a more or less closed ecological and social system. It's as close to another world as you can get while still technically in the Forgotten Realms. "On the surface of Faerun," says Producer Trent Oster, "a party can relax and rest up almost anywhere. In the Underdark resting could be the end of your entire party."

Like *Undrentide*, it requires the original *Neverwinter Nights*, but instead of starting you at first level, it's meant for levels 15 and up. One of the draws of the new expansion is the inclusion of Epic level rules, for characters above the default *D&D* maximum of 20. According to Oster, you'll probably make it to your mid-20s by the conclusion of the campaign, just a bit below the level cap of 30. Of course these extra levels bring with them Epic-level spells, abilities, and encounters. Among the high-level goodies you'll get to experience is the exquisitely-named "Infestation of Maggots" spell, which Oster describes as "buckets of good wholesome fun." It results in one to four points of Constitution damage each combat round until your target makes its saving throw—"or something really unpleasant happens." Pajak notes

DARCY PAJAK
ASSISTANT PRODUCER



ARCVIN VAGGOR

RACE AND CLASS **15th Level Half-Elf Ranger/Arcane Archer**
ALIGNMENT **Chaotic Good**

Playing Arcvin is great because I love to use all the magic arrows we have in the game. For every situation, we have an arrow. If I'm fighting humans, I use the Vampire or poison arrow. If I'm fighting fire elementals, I use the cold arrows. In addition, when I unlock the camera, I can get a greater forward field of vision so I can start picking off monsters at farther distances. And that just looks cool to boot. I also use the Arcane Archer prestige class just because of all his cool new feats. I'm looking forward to gaining more death arrows and multiple arrows per day as I get the character into the epic levels.

ARCVIN IN UNDERDARK

I will be importing this character into the *Underdark* game just so I can see him shoot arrows like he had an M-16, in addition to the epic level feats I'll gain. It would also be to see just how butch my wolf, Sierra, will get once I'm over 20th level. "Kill boy, kill!" Arcvin would venture into the Underdark because he enjoys exploring and discovering new things. He's been all around the surface of Faerun, but has not been into the Underdark. Now that he's 15th level, he wants to go into the deep and investigate it, find out all about the culture and people of the Underdark… and then kill them.

ARCVIN EXPANDED

While I could say more about Arcvin, I'd like to mention a new character that I'll most likely make in this game. It was the first character I made when I first bought *Neverwinter* a year ago. His name is Victor and he's a Rogue. As it was my first character, I'm somewhat sentimental about him, and I would like to continue his career. He would go anywhere to make gold. He's not a very deep person—he just wants to get the best sword, leather armor, and magic items gold can buy. If there is loot to be had, then Victor will come running, and I expect a whole new set of bonus magic items in *Hordes* that, due to previous level restrictions, he could not take. Now he can get the +10 magic sword that is poisoned, stuns his victims, and always keeps him invisible. He will also find that suit of armor that regenerates, so he'll never need to rest again.

ARCVIN VAGGOR

that the team is trying to keep things like this as close to the official Third Edition rules as possible, for maximum consistency. So you'll get things like Ball Lightning and Hellball, as well as Epic versions of normal feats like Reputation, Spell Focus, and Mage Armor too.

The Underdark is home to many bizzare creatures, at least 16 of which will make an appearance in *Hordes*. The dark-elven Drow, spider-like Driders, Beholders, and more should show up, as well as everyone's favorite psionic horror, the Mind Flayer. Oster says that they have a few ideas for the Illithids (the "formal" title for the Mind Flayers) but they're still tweaking the details. Think tentacles, evil, and psychic powers—in the dark. Creatures like these are one reason for characters to start at higher levels than before. Another is the environment itself. The caverns and caves of the Underdark are not for the faint of heart or weak of arm. Like *Undrentide*, the new expansion will offer a bit more of a challenge than the original game, but then again, you'll have a lot more tools to help you out. In addition to the prestige classes from the earlier module, you'll have six new ones, including the Shifter, a Druid-like class that focuses more on shape-shifting than wolf-conjuring and tree-hugging. You'll also get new feats and abilities, all of which will be available for new characters created in the original game. "If you have all three titles installed you could start up a character in the original campaign and use the new feats, skills, and even classes," says Oster, which is sure to please anyone interested in replaying the series from the ground up.

As for pointy things to stick into quivering masses of evilly glowing fungi, you'll be able to wield at least one new weapon: the Dwarven Waraxe, and Pajak says they're working on at least one more, which may or

From the Middle Ages to WWII, command the deepest RTS in history.

EMPIRES
DAWN OF THE MODERN WORLD
950 A.D. —— 1950 A.D.

Coming this Fall.

From Rick Goodman, lead designer of Age of Empires® and Empire Earth™.

EMPIRESRTS.COM

STAINLESS STEEL STUDIOS™

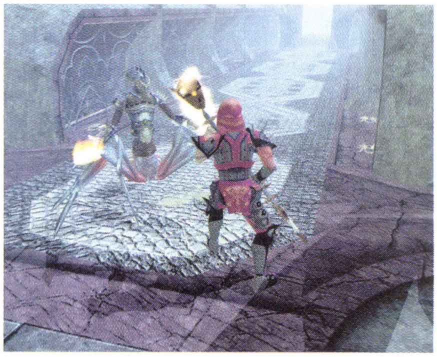
POWERED BY gamespy

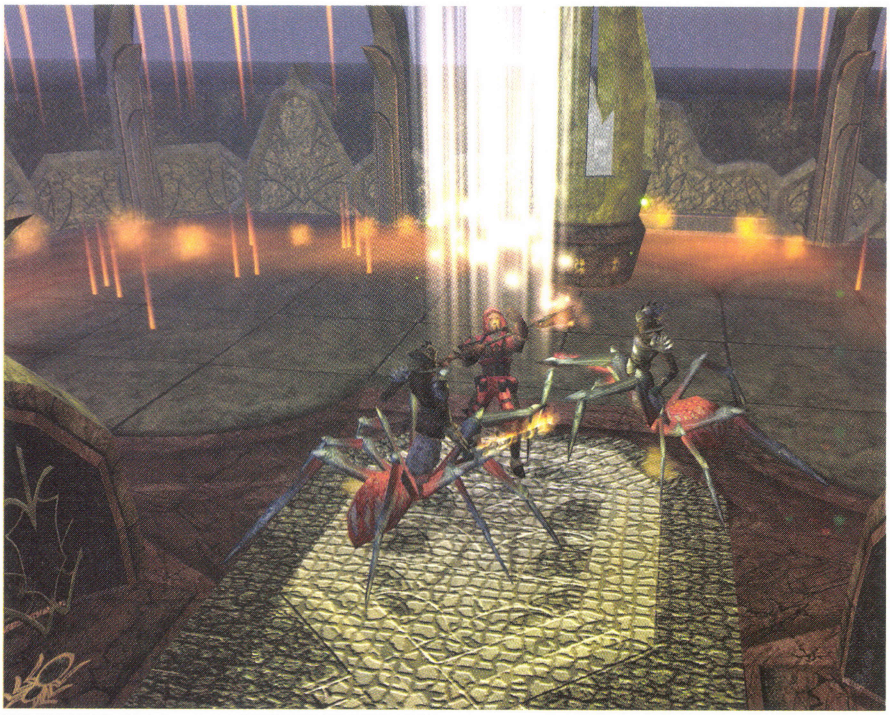
PC CD-ROM SOFTWARE

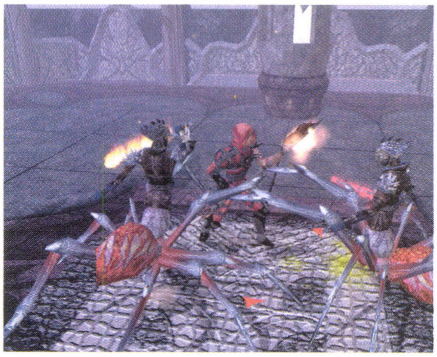
RATING PENDING RP CONTENT RATED BY ESRB
Visit www.esrb.org or call 1-800-771-3772 for Rating Information.

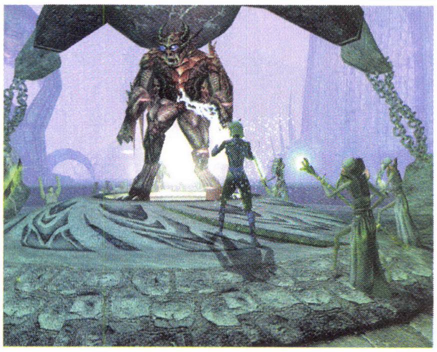
ACTIVISION.
activision.com

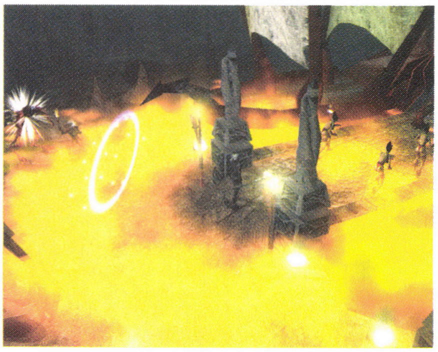
© 2003 Stainless Steel Studios. Published and distributed by Activision Publishing, Inc. Empires: Dawn of the Modern World is a trademark of Stainless Steel Studios. Activision is a registered trademark of Activision, Inc. and its affiliates. All rights reserved. The ratings icon is a registered trademark of the Interactive Digital Software Association. GameSpy and the "Powered by GameSpy" design are trademarks of GameSpy Industries, Inc. All rights reserved. All other trademarks and trade names are the properties of their respective owners.











[clockwise from top right] A hooded spellcaster confronts a pair of Driders; Entering a docked ship in the underdark; Mind Flayers wait their turn just in case she survives the Pit Fiend; Our hero does battle with two Driders; Let me through, Drider, before I ignite your thorax.

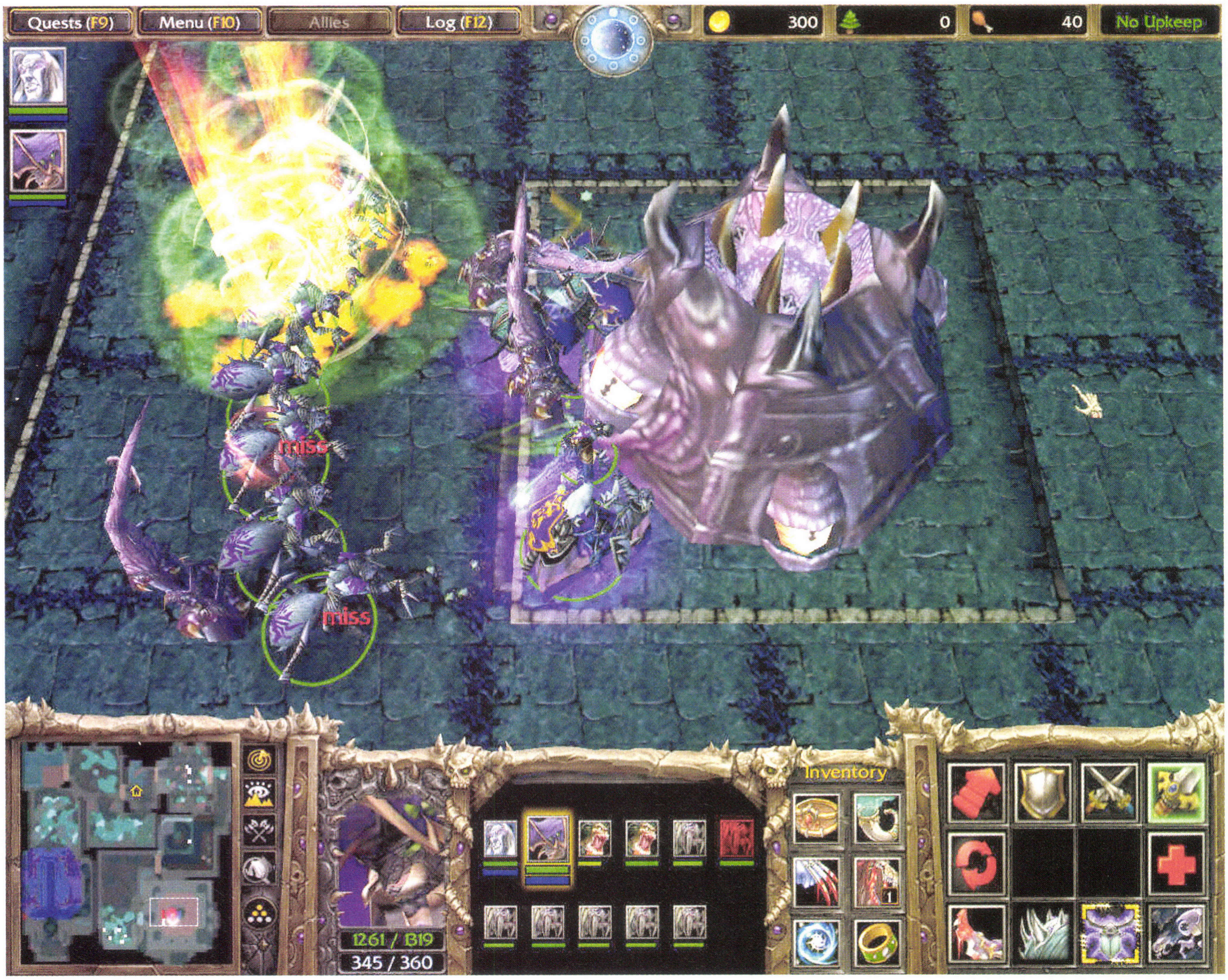
may not make the cut (pun intended). "Suffice it to say the other major weapon type we are working on is often requested by the fans," says Oster, who also says it will be "a great addition to the game" if they can get it to work. Dynamic item properties will allow everything from intelligent weapons that change over time to personalized items and weapons with much more individuality than your garden-variety pig sticker. Oster believes that this will open up new realms of player-item interaction ("Hey you, warhammer, ya wanna go get an ale?"), and when combined with new abilities to craft potions and scrolls it should truly broaden the game's non-combat options and flesh out the gameworld. Pajak says they're still working on the economics of selling player-created items, however. Timmy the Potion maker: "Let's see… I could go out and get killed by a Beholder, or have my brain sucked out by an Illithid, or I could make a million billion gold sitting in my safe tower making love potions for the ugly and infamous. Decisions, decisions…. "

Expect more fun with henchmen this time around as well. Oddities similar to Deekin, the Kobold Bard from *Undrentide*, will probably make an appearance, and as Pajak says, "there will always be memorable NPCs to hire," including perhaps a character or two from one of BioWare's earlier games, though he won't say who might be taking that all-expenses paid vacation to the Underdark. (Are you ready for another dose of "HEY! It's me, Imoen!"? Didn't think so….) Famous characters are also a real possibility, though which ones, and in what circumstances, remains a closely guarded secret. Given that the Underdark is a setting with many hooks into the epic fiction of the Forgotten Realms, the possibilities are both vast and exciting. The evil spider goddess Lolth? The fiend Errtu? Drizzt Do'Urden's nemesis: the assassin Artemis Entreri? Jimmy Hoffa? The designers aren't talking.

With play time estimated at "about fifteen to twenty human hours, and thirty-plus Trent Oster hours," *Hordes* will be about the same length as *Undrentide*, and just as replayable. If you're truly dedicated, you can start a first-level character in the first expansion, take advantage of the prestige classes introduced there, and proceed directly into the Underdark fully prepared for the ensuing horrors. Or you can just roll up a level 15 and have at it. Either way you'll have the same options of soloing it or hooking up with friends for a multiplayer adventure. Modding do-it-yourself-ers will find 6 new voice sets, 40 new spells, 50 new feats, 17 new music tracks, and 2 new tilesets along with improvements to the editor's functionality. All told, the three games—*Neverwinter Nights*, *Undrentide*, and *Hordes*, will form a massive role-playing opus with enough monster-slaying, tomb-looting, spell-flinging action to keep any adventurer busy until the Beholders come home. After that, it's every Gnome for himself.

INBOUND

Multiplayer Online Strategic Simulations
Free Play • WorldSims.com



A Swarm of Wards

With The Frozen Throne, WarCraft III continues to gleam like a jewel

★★★★☆

BY KELLY WAND

EVERY SURFACE IN *The Frozen Throne* gleams like a jewel in a Clark Ashton Smith story. *WarCraft* fans should even look forward to losing battles just to watch the bizarre new jungle and Atlantean landscapes burst alive with cascading bolts of gorgeous color, and a din of carnage ripped right from the head of Tolkien squatting in a World War I trench scribbling the beginnings of *The Silmarillion* on tattered food-ration wrappers. They'll feel set loose in a candy store as they discover the new additions, and try to integrate the most massive revision of an existing product in Blizzard's history into their delicate, now obsolete build orders.

In terms of sheer acreage, *Frozen Throne* is to its parent, and to its cousin *Brood War*, as Angelyne is to Hilary Swank. So many new considerations: can the undead grunt-rush now that they have portable blight? Is the cooldown for Big Bad Voodoo too short? Are any of the new towers worth it? What chance do faerie dragons have against unstable concoction? Are spellbreakers the counter to spirit link or vice versa? Judging from Blizzard's steady stream of patches to date, all these issues and more will likely be subject to frequent change without notice. (It seems like only yesterday that stasis traps stunned friendly units and ancient protectors had a minimum range.) Those who found *Reign of Chaos* broken, chaotic, and totally dependent on machine-like micromanagement skills (in short, like math class) will feel just as left out in the cold, despite the welcome implementation of many time-savers and re-dressings great and small.

Said re-dressings range from being able to queue multiple upgrades and infinity-

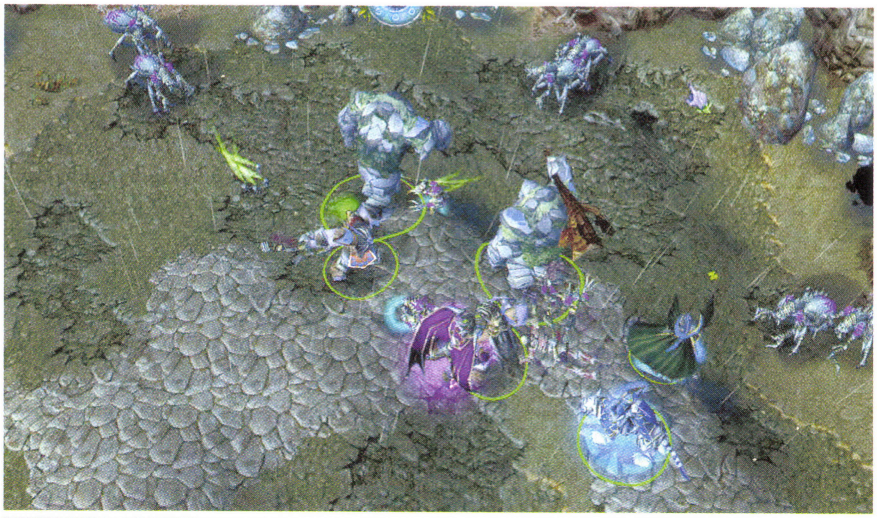
[opposite page] I've been on that date. [from top] Midnight…and the Warden is sleeping…; Blue mini-panda is most cunning, grasshopper; The only trick to Big Bad Voodoo is keeping your Shadow Hunter alive.

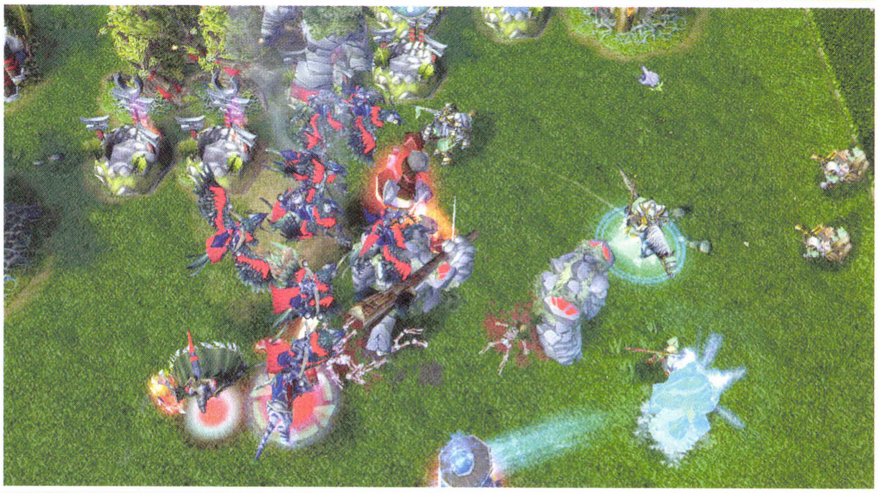
plus-one waypoints, to dismounting archers from your hippogryphs and meat wagons that self-generate corpses. Blizzard has neutralized "find-the-farm" game dragging with the "reveal" rule that gives those without a town hall two minutes to start one, or risk having all their structures exposed on the mini-map.

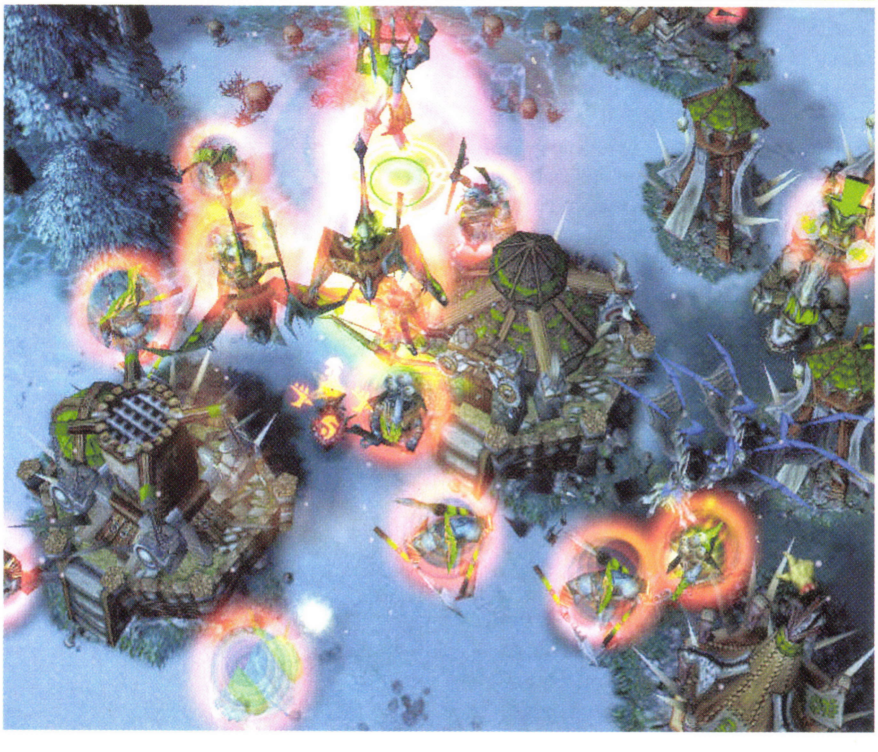
In addition to new tilesets and a thoroughly overhauled economy that switches the focus from gold to wood, each race now has a powerful new hero and can purchase any of five "neutral" heroes at a tavern building. (You can still only have up to three heroes total, town portal scrolls sold separately.) These new heroes are hands-down the biggest draw of *Frozen Throne*. Although most players will quickly settle on their long-term favorites, none feel like dead weight or an old one rehashed (despite their overly similar names). Several, like the Pandaren Brewmaster, ooze so much personality that you'll soon wonder how you ever got along without them.

In addition to old units learning new tricks, each race also gets one new ground and air unit, all apparently designed to fill in racial gaps. Orc bat-riders bolster what's been considered a third-world air force, while mountain giants offer an alternative to the perennially micro-heavy druids of the claw for the night elves. The human dragonhawk riders recall Protoss corsairs, with their cloud spell the mistier version of disruption web. Strangest of all are the undead's obsidian statues, which replenish either health or mana, and can morph into air units called destroyers, not far removed from the devourers from *Brood War*. The new units all require construction of a "magic vault" structure, which in addition to town portal scrolls and mana potions, sells gnarly, exotic items peculiar to your race. Many are startling in their implications, such as the portable scout tower that enables a genuine human tower rush, or the spy that looks like a harmless animal.

The single-player campaign—its story arc shamelessly lifted from *Brood War*—and a "bonus" orc campaign—a repetitive but strangely engaging *Diablo*-esque







heroes-only creep—exist because they're expected, and help teach new players bad defensive habits that will get them rocked on Battle.net. But why pair such vanilla *Masters of the Universe* dialogue with a freewheeling visual style? You'd expect conversations between tenth level demigods to be ten times more interesting than ours. Even so, the lush landscapes, exotic unique units, variety of tasks, sheer level of challenge—human mission six will put hair on the most eggshell-like chests—and beautifully rendered end cutscene can be said to serve as its own reward.

There are still awkward lapses that can probably be chalked up to designer arrogance. The pathing's still spotty. Although the maximum supply has been raised to 100 from 90, and the cost of most units has been slashed, you still can't control more than 12 units at a time. So now, in effect, your "racks" are even more unwieldy than before. The creeps are now marked on the mini-map, but not all of them. The game denotes shops and the important new tavern with the same archaic yellow symbol. It makes sense that not everything can be auto-cast, as finesse should be required, but some things that should be just aren't. You can't, for example, group some mountain giants, target a single tree, and then have them all make war clubs, which wear out after only fifteen hits (usually in the middle of battle). This makes them dumber than wisps, which harvest wood even when rallied to an already occupied tree. Why don't ghouls that have stopped chopping lumber because the nearest tree is more than five or six steps away qualify as idle peasants? In fact, why don't peasants and acolytes auto-harvest if they can auto-repair? The undead's obsidian statues pose the same problem as the already frail human gyrocopters: they need to be "fixed" rather than "healed," which entails bringing along peasants/acolytes to maintain them (and only twelve units a rack, remember). There's no graceful way to have a couple repairers "tag along" with an army and repair at the same time; they can follow or repair but not simultaneously....

Where *Diablo* now looks as dated as it is accessible, the *WarCraft III* franchise remains its exact opposite: luscious on the eyes and hell on the brain. Beneath the mock-epic sweep and glitzy new racing stripes, beats a more playful and relaxed heart than you'd expect on such short notice. Consider this: Blizzard's blown a fortune producing cutting-edge graphics to reinstate boats as rickety now as they were back in *Tides of Darkness*. And, inevitable fabulous profits aside, *Frozen Throne* has been designed with the best of intentions: to encourage combined arms and new thinking, and to stimulate your senses. How this plethora of highly-polished but crazy-sounding new instruments ultimately affects the symphony can only shake out after a few months of Battle.net madness, but the howls of rage from *Reign of Chaos* purists alone is worth the price of admission.

DEVELOPER Blizzard Entertainment • PUBLISHER Vivendi Universal Games • ESRB Teen

---

The Elder Scrolls III: Bloodmoon

Bark at the moon

★★★★½

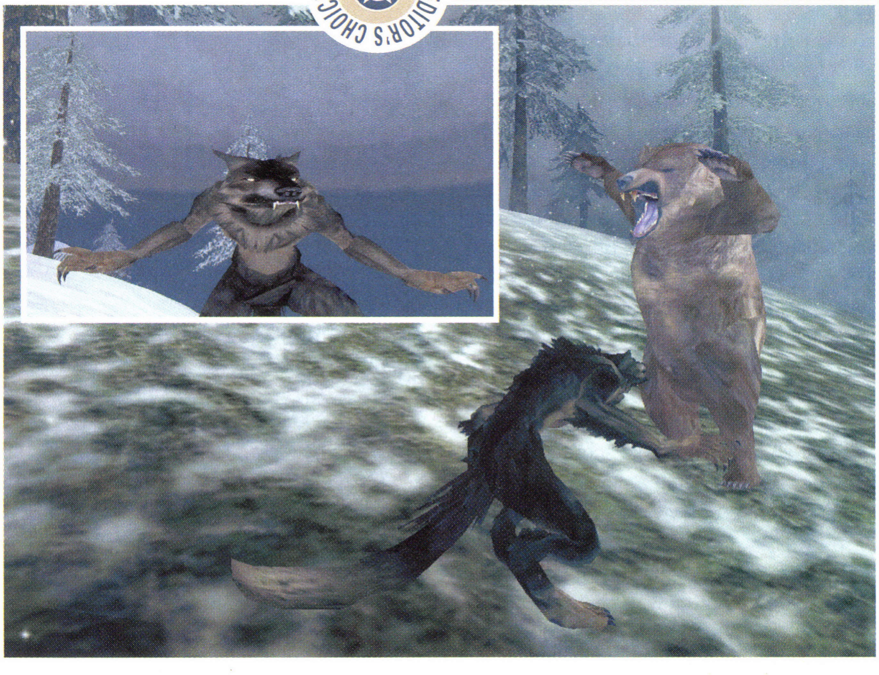
WHAT HAS TWO hairy legs, a huge snoz, and goes "munch, slurp, crunch," when it masticates? If you guessed "your date," try again, because that noise is the sound of inevitability. Fans demanded it. Bethesda said forget it but surprised everyone when it announced *Bloodmoon*, the second expansion pack to *Morrowind*, which adds the most desired feature omitted from the original game and its expansion: werewolves.

COMPUTER GAMES EDITOR'S CHOICE

Morrowind was the only computer game you needed to play with a bib, an experience not unlike trying to drink the ocean with a spoon. *Tribunal* added even more steak to the bulging buffet, cleaning up the interface with an improved quest log and the ability to add notes to the map. *Bloodmoon* arrives with the same enhancements intact, but instead of limiting you to *Tribunal*'s indoor creature gauntlets, it digs out an entirely fresh and semi-arctic island to explore.

That island is called Solstheim, and after the expansion is installed, sits just northwest of the main island Vvardenfell at roughly one-fifth its size (there's a fold-out color map of the island in the box). Stepping onto Solstheim is like getting lost in a Scandinavian dream. Weird boar-riding goblin mobs patrol the wilderness, growling ice wolves roam in packs between the trees and ice floes, and enormous shambling polar bears prowl on four legs, rearing up on two to slap you silly if

[below] Cripes, would someone get this guy some Mentos? Unless you're wolfed out or mega-leveled, be very afraid of ticking off the bears. [inset] My, what big teeth you have! One tough lupine mutha. [right] Prowling around a Nordic lodge looking for fresh meat. The slow-falling snow is the best weather effect yet in the series.



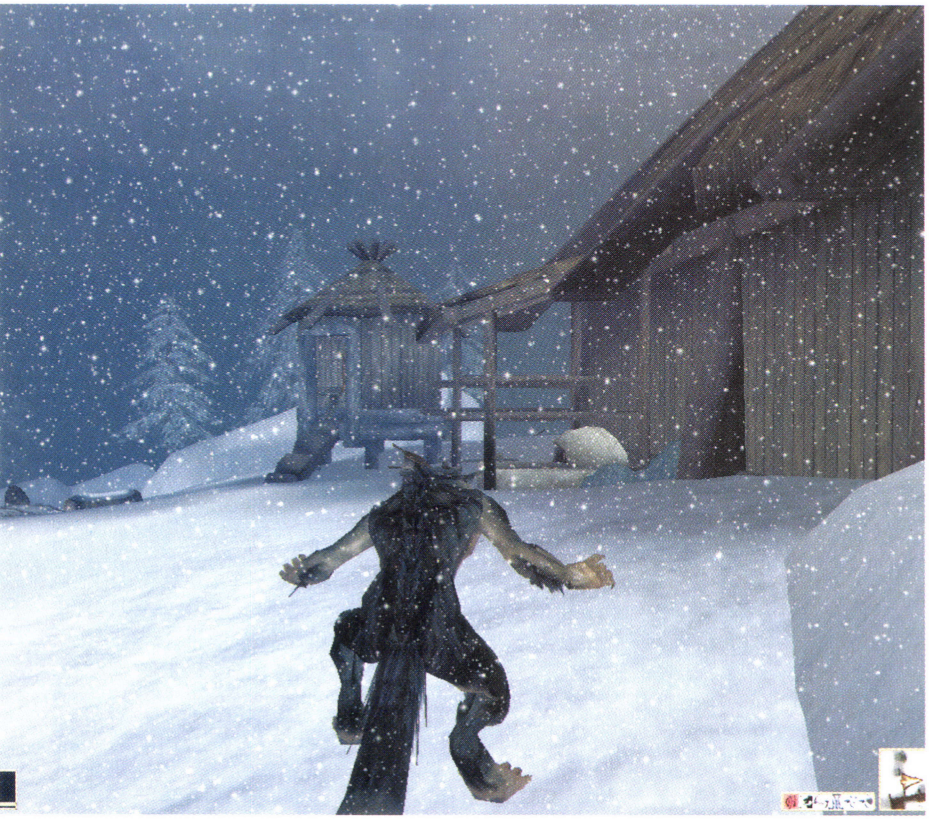
you wander too close. The foliage is completely new, a collage of green and snow-covered pines, rock formations, frozen rivers, and ice-covered lakes where getting trapped beneath the ice is a frantic mouse-clawing experience.

Other oddities abound. Nords, one of the playable races, own the island of Solstheim, having so far resisted colonization by the Dunmer (Dark Elves) that populate Vvardenfell. The Empire is trying to gain a foothold, as usual, but is having problems with its mining colonies. Your role, which varies depending on how you play the game, is essentially to explore the island and assist in various enterprises along the way, like building an entire colony.

Just as ingenious as the brilliantly-conceived participatory acting sequence in *Tribunal*, the colony-building gig runs alongside the main quest involving the East Empire Company, which puts you in the role of literally building an entire village from the roots of an ebony mine. This sort of thoughtful scripting is what sets a Bethesda role-playing experience apart from its peers. The main quest itself is a well-crafted series of surprises that gives you just enough freedom to pick sides and vary the ending. It's over too soon, but it's only half of what the game has to offer. The other half—admit it, the half you've been waiting to read about—is where you get to go around ripping people's throats out.

Playing as a werewolf in *Bloodmoon* isn't just an option, it's eventually a necessity, so you do-gooders out there might as well make your peace and prepare to sin. Becoming a werewolf involves being attacked by a werewolf and contracting lycanthropy. Three nights later (and every night thereafter), you view a brief visual sequence and then assume the form of the beast.

Werewolves are an interesting mix of pros and cons—mostly pros if you like to run really fricking fast and jump dozens of feet in the air. In werewolf form, your strength and agility skyrocket, making midnight climbs onto rooftops or bounding over huge boulders a breeze. With all that physical prowess and claws like sabers, your first instinct is literally to run around and take out everything in sight. The reality check occurs the first time you're spotted by someone during your change. Identified werewolves are scorned on sight, and the game tosses reality out the window by putting the entire "world" on notice forever thereafter, which means they attack to kill



top sellers

The battle for sales supremacy came down to The Sims versus **Vice City** and Enter the Matrix, and once again, Will Wright's creation took the top prize in May. PlanetSide made a strong debut in its first month, as did Rise of Nations.

1	**The Sims Superstar**	*Electronic Arts* ★★★★½
2	**Grand Theft Auto Vice City**	*Rockstar Games* ★★★★½
3	**Enter the Matrix**	*Atari* ★★
4	**The Sims Deluxe**	*Electronic Arts Not Rated*
5	**Planetside**	*Sony* ★★★★½
6	**Rise of Nations**	*Microsoft* ★★★★
7	**Command & Conquer Generals**	*Electronic Arts* ★★★
8	**The Sims Unleashed**	*Electronic Arts* ★★★½
9	**Delta Force Black Hawk Down**	*Nova Logic* ★★★½
10	**Battlefield 1942**	*Electronic Arts* ★★★★½
11	**SimCity 4**	*Electronic Arts* ★★½
12	**Zoo Tycoon**	*Microsoft* ★★★★½
13	**Diablo II**	*Vivendi Universal Publishing* ★★★★
14	**Roller Coaster Tycoon 2**	*Atari* ★★★★
15	**WarCraft III: Reign Of Chaos**	*Vivendi Universal Publishing* ★★★★
16	**Roller Coaster Tycoon 2: Wacky Worlds**	*Atari Not Rated*
17	**Mall Tycoon**	*Take 2* ★½
18	**Battlefield 1942: Road To Rome**	*Electronic Arts* ★★★★
19	**Backyard Baseball 2003**	*Atari Not Rated*
20	**Medal Of Honor: Allied Assault**	*Electronic Arts* ★★★★½

The May list is based on units sold by more than 70 channel partners, representing 90% of the U.S. retail consumer market. Courtesy NPDTechworld.

on sight. In other words, whatever you do, don't get caught wolfing out.

Other mitigating factors include vulnerability to silver weapons (guess what a great number of folks seem to be packing), and the inability to use weapons, armor, magical items, or cast spells in werewolf form. Most insidiously, you are required to kill at least one non-player character per night (creatures don't count) or else your health gradually drops to zero. Still, nothing beats dropping out of the sky at puma speeds on a pair of unsuspecting bad guys.

Aside from the new environs, the graphical engine is the same good-looking pig that graced computers over a year ago, except that now it runs smoothly on anything with the latest GeForce or Radeon-based graphics cards. When the weather effects kick in—and that's quite often—the frame rate chokes. You'll need a brand new PC with the latest tricks to see Solstheim in its entire wintry splendor. Music and sound seem mostly unchanged, with a few new effects for creatures, and NPC exclamations that actually have something to do with your quest for a change.

There are still bugs in the rose garden, though, and the most annoying—the dreaded "crash to desktop" that's tagged along the base code since *Morrowind*—is still here in all its enthusiasm-crushing glory. There is nothing quite like the anguish one feels losing hours of gameplay to some inexplicable combination of events. Official bug fix: save often. Other things that aren't bugs but stick out include: NPCs that still wander aimlessly night or day, and creature AI that still gets stuck around rocks and other obstacles.

If you've been waiting to pick up *Morrowind* and the first expansion wasn't enough to sway you into doing so, *Bloodmoon* is all the reason you need. Players who tried *Tribunal* and found it enjoyable but a bit underwhelming, this second expansion is easily the best of the bunch, leapfrogging even the original for buffed-up playability. *—Matthew Peckham*

DEVELOPER/PUBLISHER Bethesda Softworks • ESRB Teen

Neverwinter Nights: Shadows of Undrentide

Content to live in Aurora's shadow

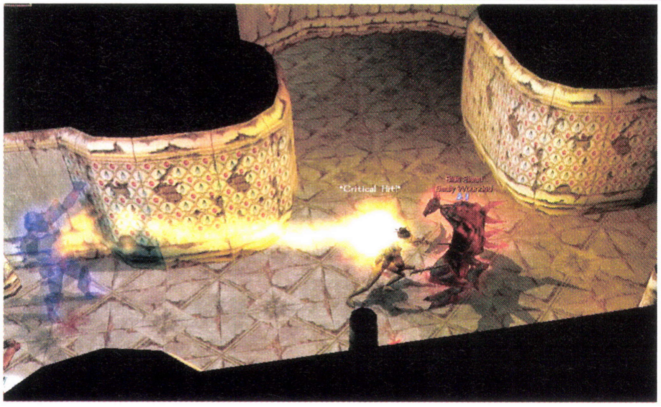
★★★½☆

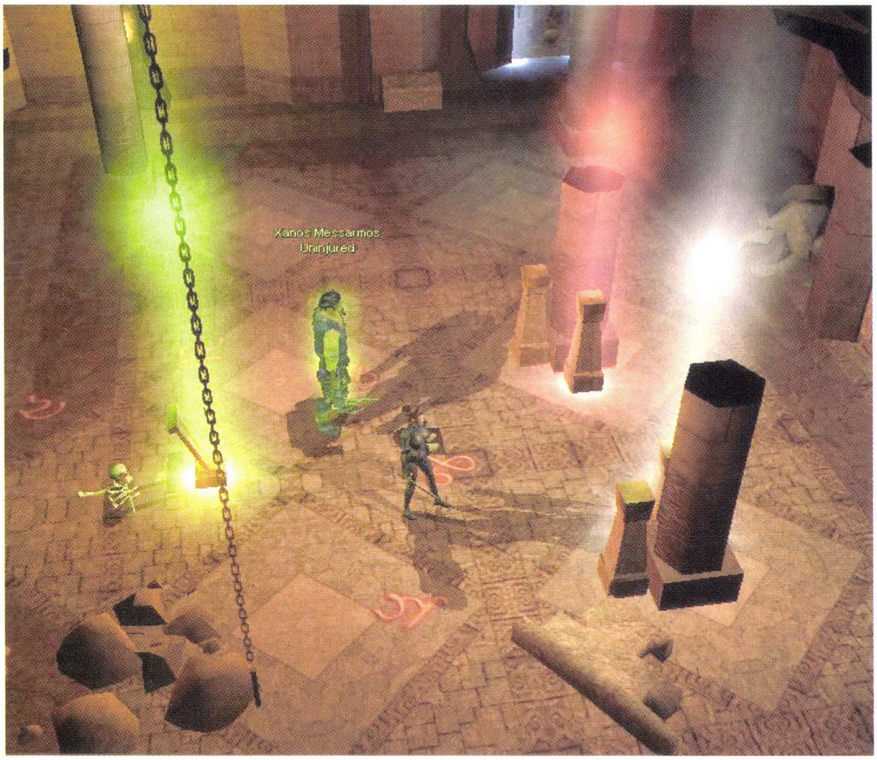
SHADOWS OF UNDRENTIDE, like its parent *Neverwinter Nights*, is a product divided. One half is a story-based role-playing adventure set in *D&D's* Forgotten Realms universe. The other half is the all-new content for digital Dungeon Masters creating modules and campaigns for the game's accessible and versatile Aurora engine. With two different, but related, audiences, it's only appropriate to cover both aspects of what is undoubtedly a mandatory purchase for fans of the series.

Floodgate obviously took the criticisms of the original *Neverwinter Nights* campaign to heart. Gone are the rows and racks of empty barrels and boxes, and the developer has replaced the much-abused infinite recall system with a ring that requires crystals in order to teleport home. Major encounters are more difficult, and mage foes are a much bigger threat. You can now work with the inventories of your henchmen and kit them out for specific encounters. Best of all, the gameplay emphasis has been shifted slightly away from hardcore hack-and-slash toward dungeon puzzles and character interaction. Of course, that's not to say that you won't be knee-deep in kobolds before the game wraps up its final act.

The plot puts you in the boots of the favorite pupil of one Master Drogan, a dwarf wizard and adventurer of wide repute. When a company of kobolds storm his Hilltop quarters and steal a quartet of ancient artifacts, you are sent forth to recover them and, predictably, find out the nature of the Foozle working behind the scenes. Unfortunately, said Foozle doesn't appear until Act II, and

[below] The new dungeon tilesets are works of art. [right] My frost giant. Your white dragon. Loser has to give up his gold-inlaid 20-sided die.





Welcome to one of the most trap-laden dungeons ever.

certainly doesn't measure up to the likes of Jon Irenicus or Ravel Puzzlewell. Your henchmen aren't much better. The best of the motley lot are Xanos Messarmos, a pretentious half-orc sorceror with a penchant for the third-person.

Sadly, it's the story that brings much of the experience down. When it isn't mired in the bog-standard conventions of stereotypical *D&D* plot construction, the writing itself features some painfully forced humor and stiff dialogue. The somewhat amateurish prose stands in stark contrast to the cleverness of conversation-tree construction, which expertly weaves in commentary from your henchmen to create some cunningly triangulated discussions. Floodgate also made a good effort to support evil characters, although many "bad guy" plot decisions promise a traitorous path only to pull the *deus ex machina* card and require you to abruptly fight your potential evil allies. Still, it's an admirable attempt, and the game does a good job planning for gender, class, and alignment. It's just too bad that the text doesn't read as well as even the original *Neverwinter Nights*.

The campaign itself is divided into two major acts and a lengthy "interlude." The latter is a bit inappropriately named—it's a grueling trek that finds the player escorting a caravan through the desert. This section features three distinct adventures, and has the best dungeons and encounters in the entire game. Act 2, with its predictable supervillain and struggling climax, isn't nearly as engaging. As a result, the 15 or so hours spent in the campaign feel uneven and a bit disjointed, with the improved battle scenarios and dungeon designs having to shoulder the burden of the choppy and segmented pacing. You don't even find out what the tongue-torquing "Undrentide" and its apparently ominous shadows are until about ten hours into the game.

Besides the new official campaign, there is new content for mod-makers, including a set of new terrain types (desert and hinterland) and an expanded bestiary. The new desert tile looks terrific—especially the dungeon tiles—and should provide a nice, exotic change of pace for forthcoming mods. The winter terrain is a little less exciting, although the incidental snow effects, along with a few frost-bitten temples and caverns, add a nice northern ambience. New spells are available, including the popular "Bigby's Hand" types. All of the new assets graft nicely into the toolset, and are sure to be popping up in many forthcoming mods.

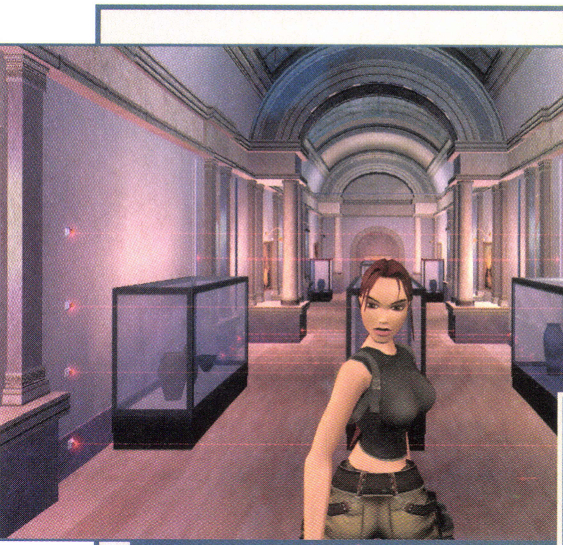
But the big addition that will surely send role-players everywhere into a sunburst of rabid geek delight are "prestige classes," which are advanced occupations with specific requirements that must be met before they can be learned. These classes bring a host of exotic feats and abilities in tow, for example: the anti-paladin Blackguard gets the "Dark Blessing," which converts the character's charisma bonus to a saving throw bonus; and the master assassin Shadow Dancer class can make themselves near-invisible, even in sunlight or while in motion. These prestige classes flavor-up mundane fighter-types nicely, and can potentially add a lot of spice to role-playing parties. Hopefully, future expansions will add additional prestige classes, since there are only but five in this installment.

Unfortunately, there's very little added to the tools that might address the biggest flaw in *Neverwinter Nights*: the reliance on the chore-like scripting language for events. A few wizards to assist in the creation of shop development and plot events have been added, but even these do little to address the toolset's reliance on programming know-how. This expansion is strictly about new content—dungeon masters looking for mechanisms to assist in the enforcement of role-play and frustrated modders grinding their way through the C-style scripting language are going to have to wait.

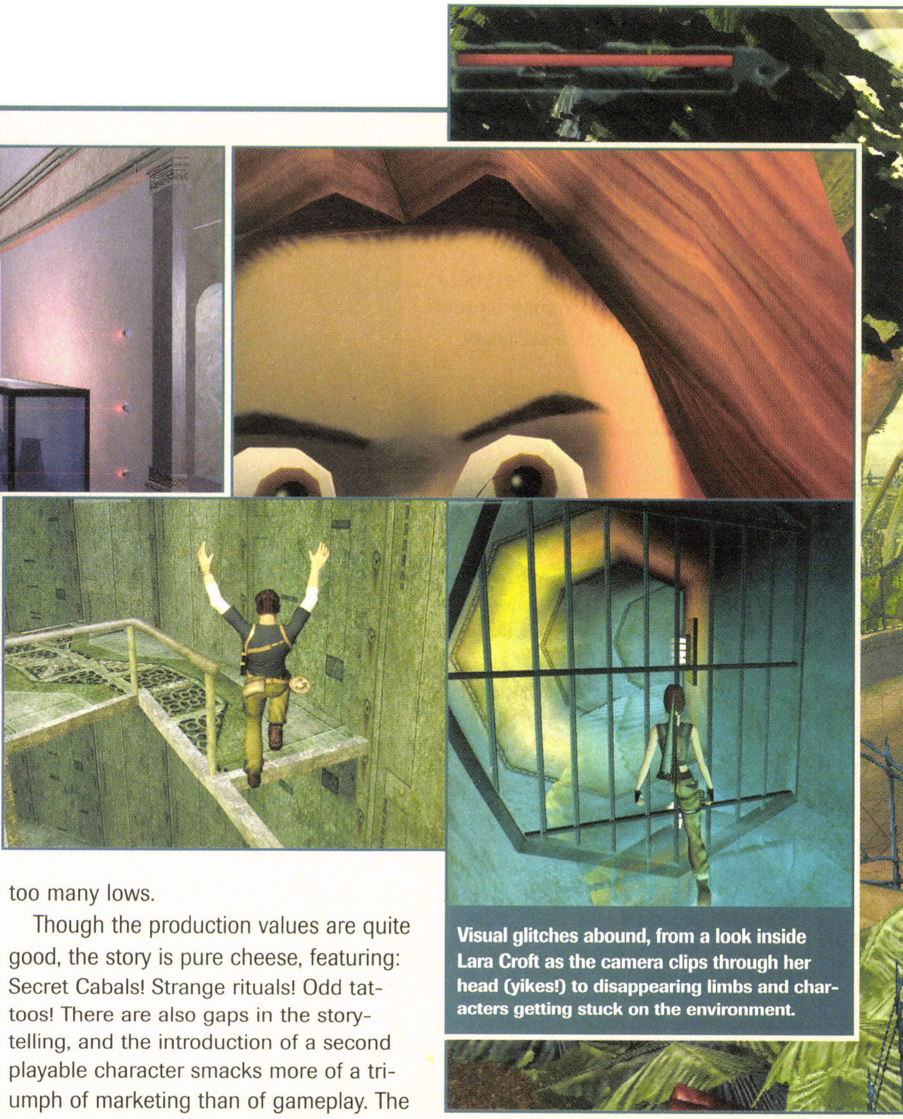
Undrentide is a better-than-average expansion pack, worth the asking price of thirty greenbacks, but diminished by its lack of any real inspiration. Still, the real impetus for purchase is the future player mods developed using this content. It's safe to say that if you want to be frolicking in the snow or sand in any forthcoming user-crafted adventures, you're obligated to buy this expansion. Given that fact, it's a shame that Floodgate couldn't set a new high-water mark for campaign development, and there's no doubt that BioWare's brilliant Aurora engine is what powers this expansion pack's middling design to a gameplay level above that of the average role-playing game. But *Shadows of Undrentide* won't truly disappoint any fan, even if it fails to inspire.

—Douglas L. Erickson

DEVELOPER Floodgate Entertainment • PUBLISHER Atari • ESRB Teen



Ouch. This can't be good for the back.



Visual glitches abound, from a look inside Lara Croft as the camera clips through her head (yikes!) to disappearing limbs and characters getting stuck on the environment.

The Last Straw

Eidos gives Lara Croft glitchy wings in ***The Angel of Darkness***

★★☆☆☆

BY STEVE BAUMAN

TOMB RAIDER has become the poster child for milking a franchise. Despite legitimate criticisms over stagnant technology, the lesser entries in the series were sunk not because of the lack of a gee-whiz new engine, but due to a lack of polish and, more importantly, a general move away from what made the original so compelling—the idea that you were a female Indiana Jones. Exploring poorly rendered outdoor areas and blocky modern cities doesn't quite have the same kick as exploring Egyptian pyramids.

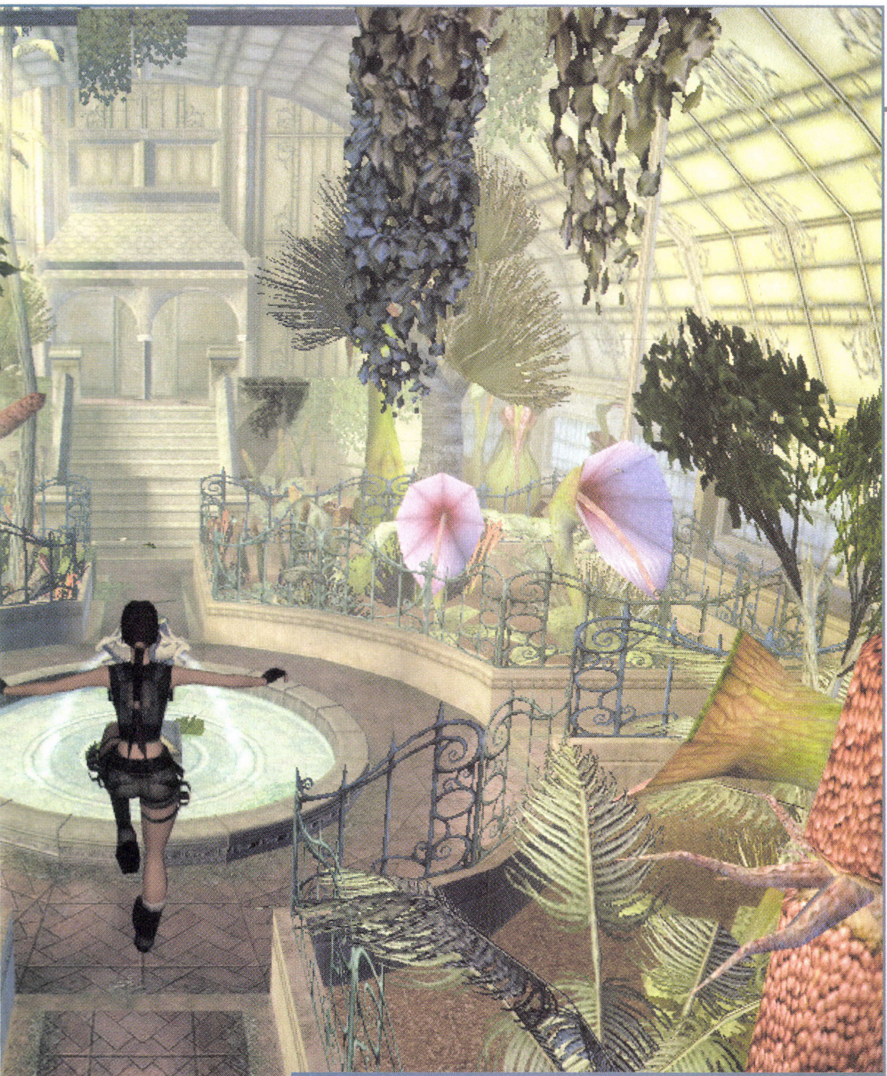
After a three-year break, the long awaited *Angel of Darkness* brings Lara Croft back to... exploring cities; Paris and Prague, to be specific. At least they look better. You get to explore exotic tunnels, sewers, and apartments as you uncover who killed Werner Von Croy, the guy that left Lara for dead at the end of *Revelation*. You also get to explore some archaeological digs below the Louvre, and that's where the game comes into its own. But the highs are way offset by too many lows.

Though the production values are quite good, the story is pure cheese, featuring: Secret Cabals! Strange rituals! Odd tattoos! There are also gaps in the storytelling, and the introduction of a second playable character smacks more of a triumph of marketing than of gameplay. The levels are a decidedly mixed bag. Most look good, but are full of illogical button flipping (who designed these places?), and no real puzzles of any merit. Completing the game is more an act of surviving the interface and some truly awful boss battles.

Despite what is described on the box as a "brand new ultra-realistic game engine and control system," *Angel of Darkness* looks like a slightly updated version of the older games, with the same sluggish controls that were acceptable when the game debuted in 1996, but are nearly useless today, especially in light of other third-person 3D games that get it right—where's mouselook? There's almost no connection between your keypresses and Lara's movements on-screen. It feels like she's moving through molasses, and every animation needs to play to completion before the next input is allowed so Lara still moves with long, uninterruptible strides. In fact, they're the same animations seen since the first game.

Lara has few new tricks stuffed in her sports bra, despite the game's protracted development. There's a cute new "running up stairs" animation, but trying to turn while in mid-trot causes her to spin around wildly. The biggest new gameplay addition—an energy meter that gradually decreases when Lara climbs, causing her to lose grip—only serves to eliminate some of the exploration of the early games. There's also a pseudo-role-playing element where Lara needs to increase her stats in order to, say, make a certain length of jump ("My legs feel stronger," she says), but it's just another switch that needs flipping before you can progress in a level.

Core and Eidos promote the new stealth features, but they're useful maybe once or twice in the entire game. There's also a new playable character named



Some of the levels showcase the new engine quite impressively.

"Generic Action Hero Guy," or Kurtis Trent—note the cool, marketing-approved, alternative spelling of the first name to make it more memorable. He may as well be Larry Croft, because he has the exact same moves and capabilities as our erstwhile heroine. Why he's even in the game at all is a mystery—it is, after all, technically called *Lara Croft: Tomb Raider: The Angel of Darkness*. (The more cynical would say, "clearly they hope to launch a new franchise down the road," but he's only available for one level and one boss fight so it's hard to figure out why they bothered.)

That doesn't even get into all of the bugs and glitches. *Angel of Darkness* is the first game to take advantage of true DirectX 9 cards like the Radeon 9700 and GeForce FX cards, but there are visual issues with the former, from disappearing and flashing walls, to model corruption. The sound drops in and out, the shotgun is apparently the new invisible version (this was fixed a few days after launch), characters get stuck on objects, the bad guy AI is non-existent, and the font used for the subtitle text is missing some characters like "smart quotes," leaving blank squares for every contraction. And it's pretty funny that a game with bloody ritual killings and at least one decapitation is able to score a "Teen" rating.

For a company flagship, Eidos sure treats Lara, and her fans, shabbily. There are times when it all comes together, when you're jumping over collapsing floors, scaling walls, and discovering ancient paintings, and those few times remind you why you loved the series in the first place, but those times are too few and too far between.

DEVELOPER Core Design • PUBLISHER Eidos Interactive • ESRB Teen

Star Trek Elite Force II

Set phasers to snooze

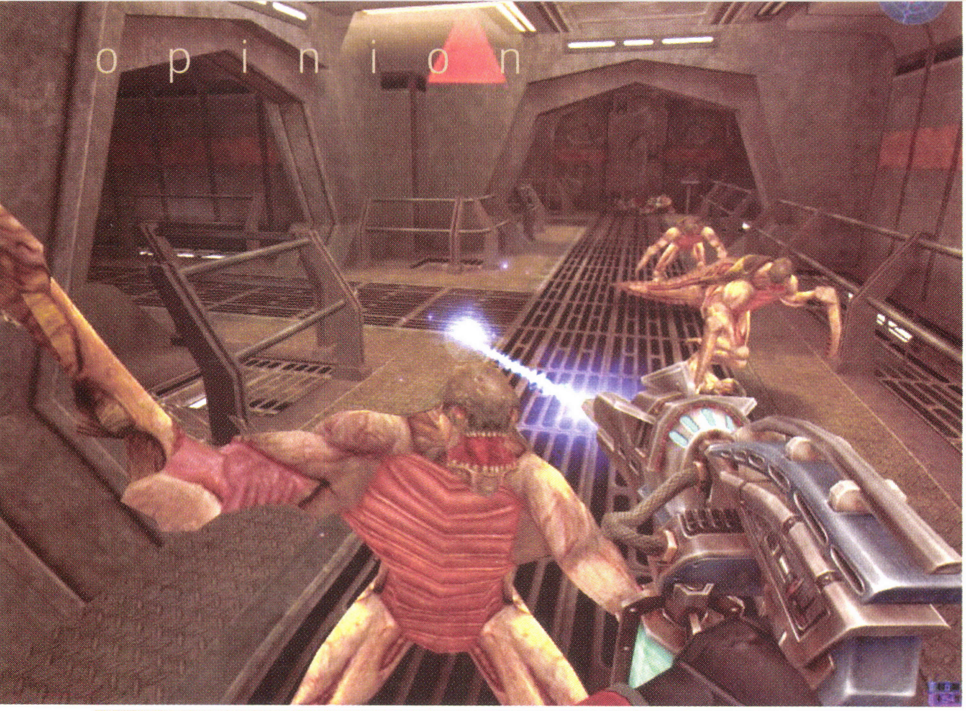
★★⯪☆☆

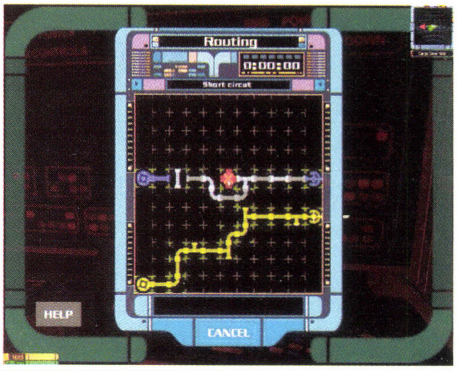
ELITE FORCE II is more like an episode of any post-1960s rendition of the TV series than a first-person shooter. That may please Trekkers, who want to live out their Roddenberry-fuelled dreams of boldly going where no one has gone before, but it won't satisfy anybody else, especially action aficionados looking to lock photon torpedoes on target and bring all tubes to bear. Although you do get to blast Borg and kill Klingons, these moments are secondary to lackluster level design and a turgid story that gets in the way too often.

Developer Ritual Entertainment puts too much emphasis on recreating the *Next Generation* atmosphere, and not enough on keeping players awake. Where the original *Elite Force* added *Star Trek* trappings to a shooter, the sequel adds shooter trappings to *Star Trek*. The result isn't pretty, unless you skip the campaign and go straight to multiplayer mode, which includes full bot support and a great class-based game called Specialities.

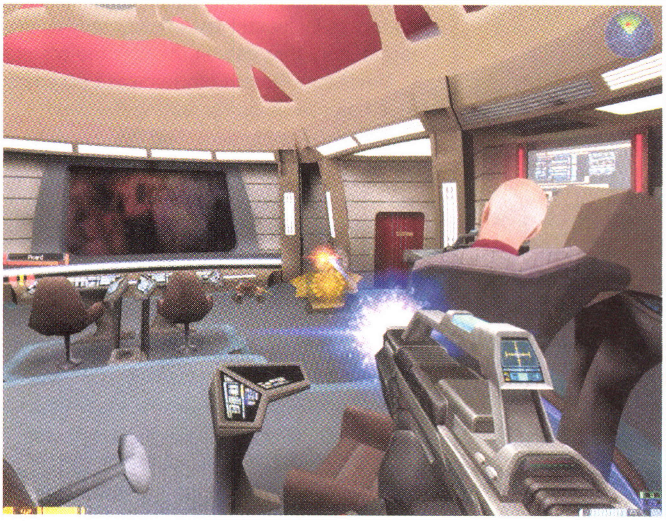
The solid script extends the story from the original *Elite Force*. It begins with the Special Forces-like Hazard Team helping Voyager escape the Borg and leave the Delta Quadrant for good. Alex Munro and his comm-badge commandos then return to Earth and wind up helping Jean-Luc Picard and the U.S.S. Enterprise battle insect aliens and pesky Romulans. This tale features a superior script to either of the last two *Star Trek* movies, although the writers shouldn't get big-headed about praise like this, as more literate compositions than *Star Trek: Insurrection* have been written on bathroom walls.

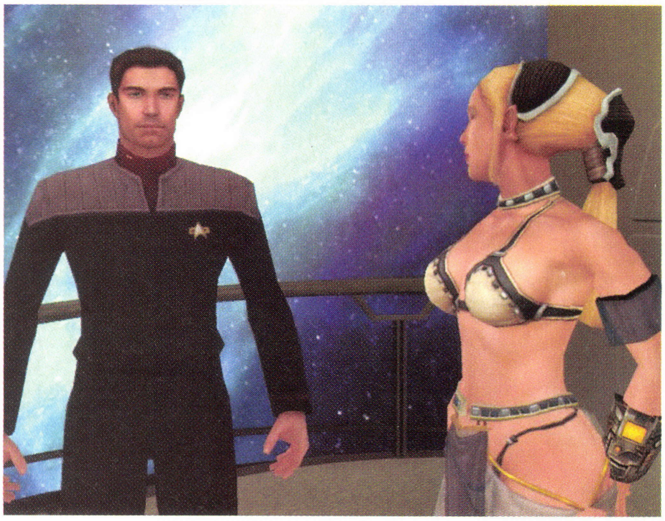
Yet it still misses the mark as a game. *Elite Force II* shoots wide of the Star Trek sweet spot between action and sci-fi gobbledygook. Design is the real killer. Missions feature too much wandering around and too little letting fly with Federation-approved BFGs. Levels consist of one key-hunt after another. You're always opening sealed doors, by either bypassing power conduits or playing mini-games on your tricorder. When you're not



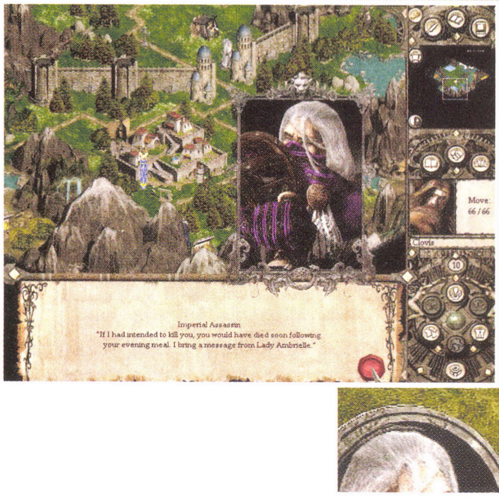

Routing
0:00:00
Short circuit
HELP
CANCEL

[counter-clockwise from above] **ELITE FORCE II:** Tricorder mini-games aid in your quest to unlock every door in the galaxy; Termites have become a real problem in the 24th century; Defending the Enterprise alongside Picard is brief but memorable; Welcome to tonight's episode of Love, Federation Style.

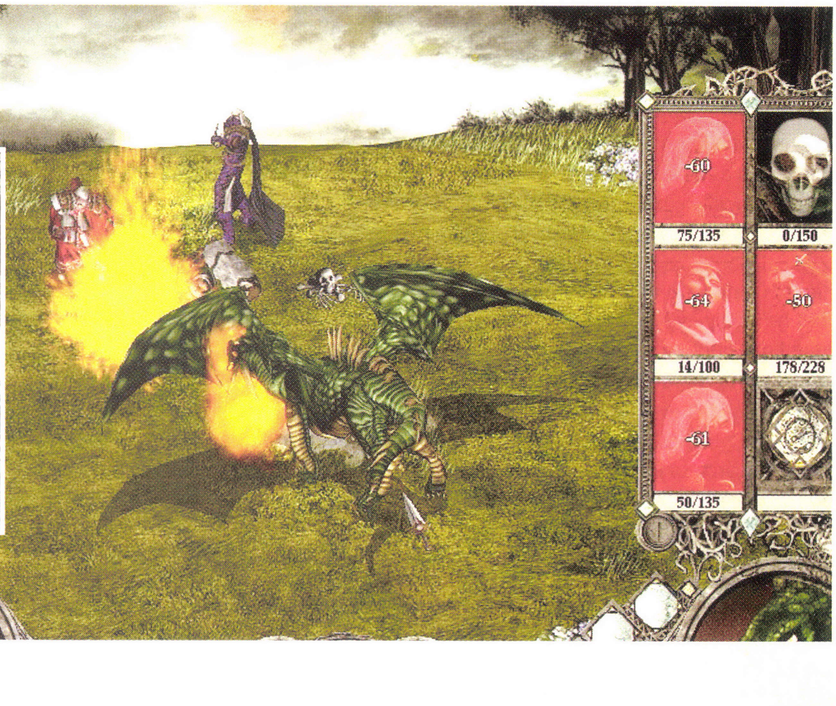




[below] **GUARDIANS OF THE LIGHT:** Courtly intrigue is a big part of the Empire campaign. [right] Epic battles are common in Guardians of the Light.


Move:
66 / 66
Clovis

Imperial Assassin
"If I had intended to kill you, you would have died soon following your evening meal. I bring a message from Lady Ambrielle."


-60
75/135
0/150
-64
-50
14/100
178/228
-61
50/135

playing engineer, you're leaping over laser beams, and dodging giant pistons like some space-age Super Mario. Brand-X design is matched by generic shooter locales and architecture. Not only are there factory and sewer levels, there is a factory *in* a sewer level. And the aged *Quake III* engine's problems with open spaces keep you as cramped as a cubicle-bound office worker. At times it feels like you're boldly going to the copy machine, not fighting evil aliens bent on destroying the Federation.

Mission progression overall is similar to that in *Jedi Knight II*, in that things start slow and get better as the game goes on. But there is no saving-grace of Force powers here. There are some great moments—such as defending the bridge of the Enterprise with Picard, foiling alien sabotage on the hull of the ship just like in *Star Trek: First Contact*, and a number of challenging boss-battles including one against a giant Borg drone—but for the most part your adversaries are insects who mindlessly charge no matter what the situation. And scraps with smart opponents are often wrecked by dumb teammates who shout: "cover me!" before charging directly into your line of fire. Regardless of who's on the opposite-end of your phaser blasts, fights wrap up quickly and you're soon back to fiddling with your tricorder and unlocking more doors.

Even if the combat were more memorable, actionus interruptus would still put you to sleep. Fighting is constantly interrupted. Firefights in ancient ruins are halted for a long talk with alien scientists. Boarding the Enterprise is paused so the bad guy can give a Bwahahaha! speech. Even the tension of fighting that big Borg boss is broken up with three or four cinematic clips. Downtime between missions is even more maddening, as it comes with vignettes packed with objectives like visiting the locker room and enduring debriefing sessions with Picard. More time is wasted with a romantic subplot where you pitch the woo at either an alien scientist babe or one of your butch teammates. This takes the form of question-and-answer sessions featuring less chemistry than the average episode of *Blind Date*, though they're not entirely annoying since the alien chick is apparently allergic to clothes.

All of this stuff may be apropos for today's give-peace-a-chance *Star Trek*, but it isn't very fulfilling as part of a shooter. As much as *Elite Force II* commits to bringing the *Star Trek* universe to life, gameplay is mostly buried under so much unnecessary dialogue and so many unimaginative levels that not even Dr. McCoy could resuscitate it. *—Brett Todd*

DEVELOPER *Ritual Entertainment* • PUBLISHER *Activision* • ESRB *Teen*

Disciples II: Guardians of the Light

A new twist on expansion packs focuses on the good guys

★★★½☆

MARKETING HAS A lot to do with *Disciples II: Guardians of the Light*. The first of two expansion packs planned for Strategy First's critically-acclaimed, consumer-ignored franchise set in the realm of Nevendaar isn't quite an add-on, a sequel, or a knockoff kicked out the door. But even though this stand-alone expansion can't be pigeonholed, it remains a great addition to the stable of titles in the best fantasy-oriented strategy series on the market.

The concept is a winner on paper. Bundling the white-hat Empire and Mountain Clans campaigns from *Disciples II: Dark Prophecy* with two new high-level mini-campaigns for the races, ten new skirmish maps, support for 1280x1024 resolution, some tantalizing new tunes, and a random map editor seems like a great idea...even if you have to wait for the sister *Servants of the Dark* expansion to properly conclude your adventures.

And the quality has been kept high. Both mini-campaigns equal anything from *Disciples* or *Disciples II*, with scripted sequences detailing the travails of the civil-warring Empire and the Ragnarok-ravaged Dwarves. New leaders, such as a valiant Paladin fighting to rule the Empire and a succession of untrustworthy Elf lords, freshen up the familiar setting, and the high-level goings-on (you need a 10th-level character or higher to begin the new scenarios) add an epic feel to battles with dragons and enemy wizards.

Still, there are problems. Fantastic campaigns or not, it makes little sense for newbies to buy this expansion for $20 when the full *Disciples II* can be scooped out of bargain bins for half the price. And those who have already had the pleasure of exploring Nevendaar aren't going to be thrilled with the "Greatest Hits"-style marketing, where you have to buy old stuff again to get a few new ditties.

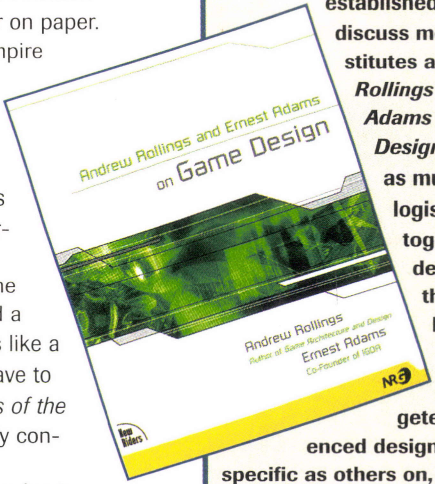
Having to pick up the companion piece later this summer to complete the story begun here isn't a plus, either. *Disciples II: Guardians of the Light* has a lot going for it, though it's not the best introduction to this stellar series, and it doesn't offer quite as much bang for the buck as it should to the existing fanbase. *—Brett Todd*

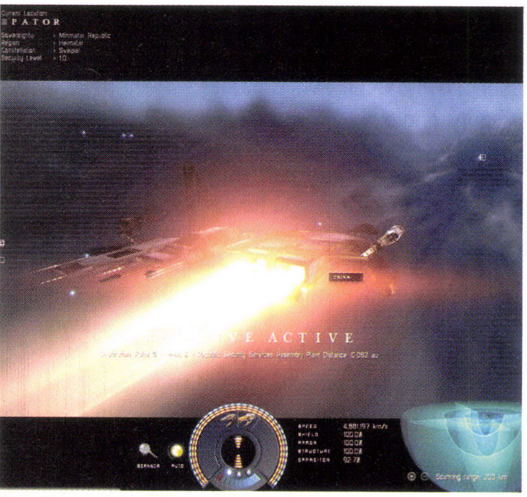
DEVELOPER/PUBLISHER *Strategy First* • ESRB *Teen*

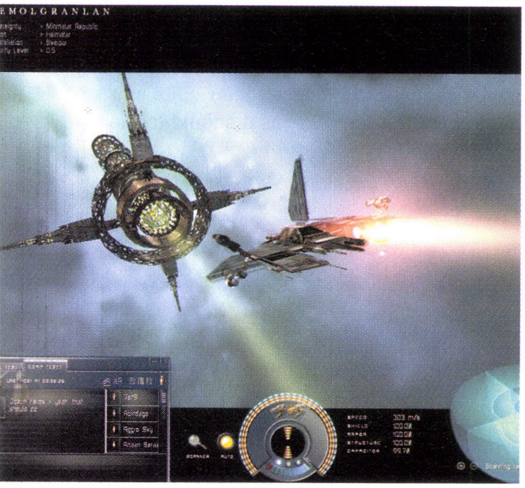
spotlight

Design is Law

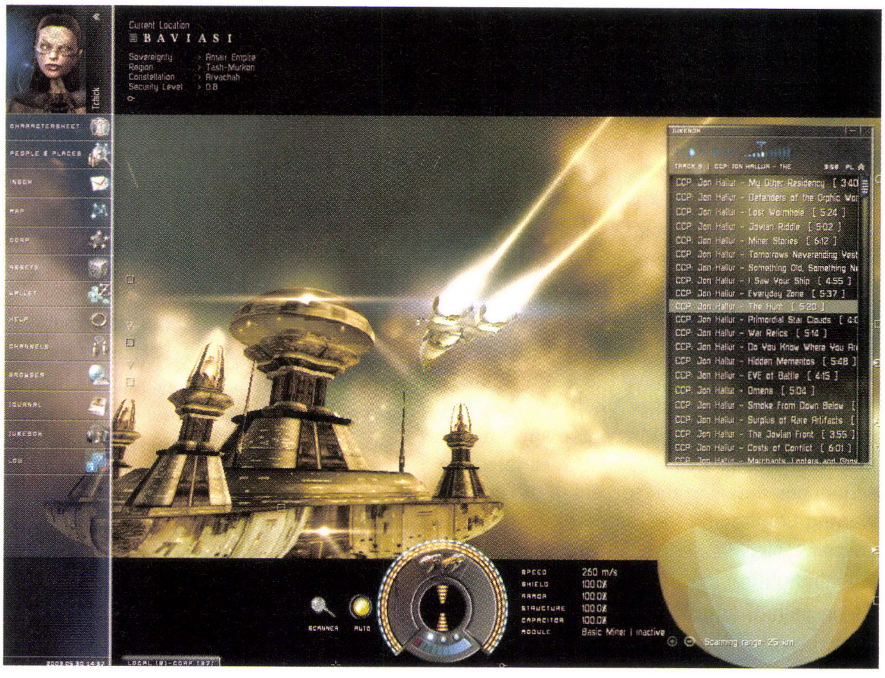
Writing a book on game design is about as tricky as designing an actual game. The "rules" are vague and constantly changing, and there's no real established language to discuss most of what constitutes a game. *Andrew Rollings and Ernest Adams On Game Design* is concerned as much with the logistics of putting together a game design as it is with the process itself. Because it offers a more general overview targeted at less experienced designers, it's not as specific as others on, say, specifically how to design a massively-multiplayer game. But if you're out there with a great idea ratting around your brain and you want to get it down on paper, this is a terrific place to start thinking about the concepts and choices that make for a great game. [New Riders Games]




Current Location
PATOR
Sovereignty > Minmatar Republic
Region > Heimatar
Constellation > Svapal
Security Level > 1.0
VE ACTIVE
SCANNER
AUTO
SPEED
SHIELD
ARMOR
STRUCTURE
CAPACITOR
Scanning range 200 km


EMOLGRANLAN
Minmatar Republic
Heimatar
Svapal
0.5
SCANNER
AUTO
SPEED
SHIELD
ARMOR
STRUCTURE
CAPACITOR

[from top] This is a mining ship; Going out to pick up rocks; Bringing home the rocks.


Current Location
BAVIASI
Sovereignty > Amarr Empire
Region > Tash-Murkon
Constellation > Aryachah
Security Level > 0.8
Tchick
CHARACTERSHEET
PEOPLE & PLACES
INBOX
MAP
CORP
ASSETS
WALLET
HELP
CHANNELS
BROWSER
JOURNAL
JUKEBOX
LOG
JUKEBOX
TRACK 9 | CCP: JON HALLUR - THE
3:58 PL
CCP: Jon Hallur - My Other Residency [3:40
CCP: Jon Hallur - Defenders of the Orphic Wor
CCP: Jon Hallur - Lost Wormhole [5:24]
CCP: Jon Hallur - Jovian Riddle [5:02]
CCP: Jon Hallur - Miner Stories [6:12]
CCP: Jon Hallur - Tomorrows Neverending Yest
CCP: Jon Hallur - Something Old, Something Ne
CCP: Jon Hallur - I Saw Your Ship [4:55]
CCP: Jon Hallur - Everyday Zone [5:37]
CCP: Jon Hallur - The Hunt [5:20]
CCP: Jon Hallur - Primordial Star Clouds [4:0
CCP: Jon Hallur - War Relics [5:14]
CCP: Jon Hallur - Do You Know Where You Ar
CCP: Jon Hallur - Hidden Mementos [5:48]
CCP: Jon Hallur - EVE of Battle [4:15]
CCP: Jon Hallur - Omens [5:04]
CCP: Jon Hallur - Smoke From Down Below [
CCP: Jon Hallur - Surplus of Rare Artifacts [
CCP: Jon Hallur - The Jovian Front [3:55]
CCP: Jon Hallur - Costs of Conflict [6:01]
SCANNER
AUTO
SPEED 260 m/s
SHIELD 100.0%
ARMOR 100.0%
STRUCTURE 100.0%
CAPACITOR 100.0%
MODULE Basic Miner | inactive
Scanning range 25 km
LOCAL [8] - CORP [37]

Eve Online

Romancing the stones

★★☆☆☆

EVE ONLINE IS the best game about mining since *Dig Dug*. The twist this time is that you're in space. You fly your ship out to an asteroid belt, which is just a little line of floating rocks formed into an arc to make them more belt-like. You check the manual to figure out which nonsense ore name will yield you the most lucrative nonsense metal name. For instance, Omber and Kernite will both give up the same amount of Isogen, but Kernite's Mexallon content makes it more lucrative (don't worry, this will all be clear after the first five to ten hours). Then you park in front of the appropriate asteroid, turn on your mining lasers, and read a book or make a sandwich or something while your cargo hold slooooowly fills up. Then you fly back to base and cash in your goodies. Do this about fifty times to get a better ship, which will allow you to haul more asteroid ore, which will enable you to get an even better ship that can haul even more asteroid ore.

Although *Eve Online* is a downtime intensive game, sometimes pirates attack you, which means you have to mess around with some itty bitty buttons to fire your guns, missiles, or shield boosters. Sometimes, you'll have to run away if the pirates are too powerful. These are the times when messing with the scrunched up interface and its too few hotkeys is truly aggravating. At other times, since the pace is so laid back when your lasers are caressing a space rock, the little buttons and fine text aren't that big a deal.

Since the game is set in space, you'd think there would be other things to do. Trading, for instance. Buying low and selling high, a la *Elite* and most recently *Freelancer*. But the interface and the economy do everything in their power to discourage this, apparently so you can spend more time with the space rocks. Even less lucrative, but considerably easier than trading, are agent missions, which are FedEx runs that newbies can do before they get comfortable nuzzling the asteroids. These missions highlight how tedious it is to travel long distances. The tedium and low pay will eventually drive you to curl up somewhere with a nice asteroid.

Eve Online is most exciting early on. You're still coming off the buzz of having created a lavishly detailed custom character with a unique face and a storied past. You haven't figured out yet that no one is ever going to see this face, which was apparently there just to fill that square at the top of the character sheet, and that the background is simply a veiled way of choosing skills, many of which aren't useful. But you don't know this yet and the agent missions have you zipping around among the different systems, giving you a taste of the distinct and imaginative artwork for the stations and spacecraft, but not enough exposure to know how much they suffer from repetition. Since this is one of those massively multiplayer things, you'll be excited at the prospect of a dynamic economy with crafting and research and all the skills and different types of weapons and the myriad ways you can modify your space ship.

But before long, you'll realize how many holes are left in the design, waiting for the developers to plug in content. You'll come to learn that combat isn't a viable way of life since the penalties for death are so prohibitive, potentially robbing you not just of money, but something even more valuable: time. Death can mean the loss of days of real time spent training skills. There are plenty of closed off areas, useless skills, undone features, and gameplay limitations that no amount of role-playing among the game's three thousand or so devoted fans and their corporations/clans can replace. *Eve Online* is like living in a house where the bedroom is done, but the contractors are still working on everything else. It all comes down to you and a rock, floating together in space, with all the action and serene beauty of the docking sequence from *2001*. Play some Strauss and go make another sandwich. *–Tom Chick*

DEVELOPER *CCP* • PUBLISHER *Simon & Schuster Interactive* • ESRB *Teen*

World War II: Frontline Command

Fighting Hitler can still be sort of interesting

★★★☆☆

JUST WHEN YOU thought that developers had finally gotten over their World War II kick, along comes yet another game to make Tom Brokaw drool. Actually, it's debatable whether or not even the fawning newscaster-cum-worshipper of the "Greatest Generation" would produce much saliva over *World War II: Frontline Command*, as the real-time strategy game isn't so much about battling the Nazis as it is about battling design limitations. England's Bitmap Brothers provides some welcome innovations and momentous battles, but a lot of little problems and omissions keep you alternating between enjoying the last good war and enduring it.

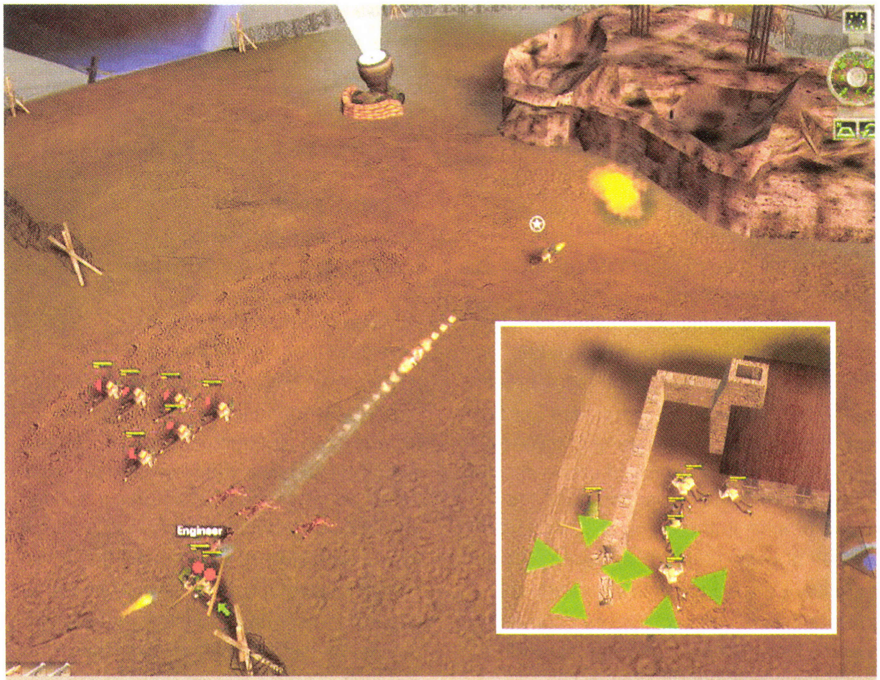
The basic design, however, is pretty solid. Unfortunately, that's because this sort of resourceless real-time strategy game has been done a thousand times before. As a low-level officer for the Allies, you fight the Nazis across post-D-Day Europe by employing soldiers and vehicles provided at the beginning of each mission. Aside from the ability to call in occasional reinforcements, you have to get the job done with what you're initially given. Units themselves come in a two-dozen-strong variety and are realistic to the point that you don't get any unwelcome surprises. Tiger tanks own any battlefield that they prowl, sub-machine gunners are amazing ambush tools, and Nebelwerfer rocket-launchers are suitably cool to look at even when they're decimating your Shermans.

Stripping down the game mechanics nicely cuts down on all the barracks-building and coal-collecting stuff, though it also eliminates pure strategizing. As you don't decide what units to employ in specific situations, missions turn into puzzles where you have to fit the riflemen, snipers, and Sherman tanks that you've been given into their appropriate slots. Little room is left for experimentation. Every map has been carefully designed to feature just one or two paths to victory and a lot of paths to bloody defeat.

Horrible pathfinding makes it difficult to stay on these roads to Nazi-smashing glory, too. Units constantly wander off track, often in the worst situations. Carefully planned hedgerow- and wall-covered routes are continually ruined because a few free thinkers decide to take a shortcut in plain sight of the bad guys in funky armbands. You can compensate for this by giving your men plenty of margin for error, and staggering orders so that they don't bump into one another and decide they need more breathing room, but this shouldn't be necessary.

Better things are provided by the atmosphere, which takes your mind off puzzle-solving, courtesy of an emphasis on squad-level operations such as taking out enemy bunkers and blowing up radar installations. The feel in *Frontline Command* is akin to classic *Close Combat*, with even more authenticity in spots thanks to a persnickety fog of war that lets you track Heinrich and pals by both sight and sound. Morale is also a factor. Let it drop too low and units refuse orders. Push it to the maximum and your little guys enter Hero Mode, where they try for the Congressional Medal of Honor by lobbing grenades into pillboxes. Such attention to detail keeps you close to the grunts on the ground.

But because of this focus on the little things, missions lack the big-picture oomph of historical authenticity. Still, some of the maps are expansive. Going into Berlin at the close of the war is suitably epic in scope, even if the missions that you're asked to complete never really happened. But that scale comes with a price. Due to the large maps and the fully 3D engine, the game is a real performance pig. Expect slow-motion marching if you're running at 1024x768 and above without some serious muscle under the hood. Such hefty system requirements rankle the sensibilities a bit because, frankly, the soldiers and landscapes don't look nearly good enough to demand this sort of horsepower. The graphics say budget title,



Take that, Fritz! [inset] Nazis have nothing on terrible pathfinding, especially in spots like this.

but the performance does not.

Also, the game lacks the strong multiplayer modes and support that a game needs to have legs these days. There is just a single game option, with two available victory conditions, allowing up to four players to battle over a map, and online matching is handled exclusively by GameSpy. That's not good enough, especially when the solo campaign provides just a dozen or so memorable missions.

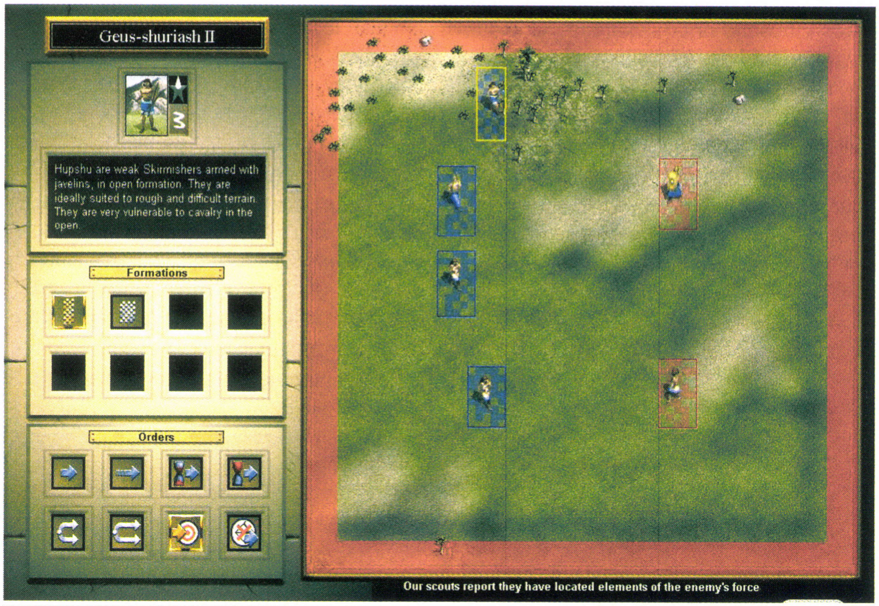
Add up all of *World War II: Frontline Command's* limitations and you have a mediocre to average game with just enough in the way of innovations and highlights to make it worth a look. Particularly for those who still haven't gotten enough World War II gaming.—*Brett Todd*

DEVELOPER *The Bitmap Brothers*
PUBLISHER *Strategy First* • ESRB *Teen*

Chariots of War

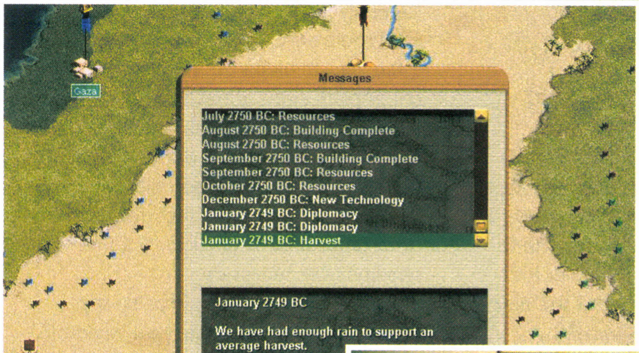
Big wheel, keep on turning

★★☆☆☆



Hupshu are weak Skirmishers armed with javelins, in open formation. They are ideally suited to rough and difficult terrain. They are very vulnerable to cavalry in the open.

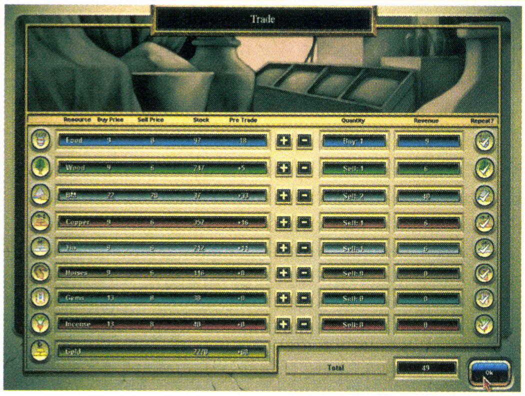
Our scouts report they have located elements of the enemy's force



July 2750 BC: Resources
August 2750 BC: Building Complete
August 2750 BC: Resources
September 2750 BC: Building Complete
September 2750 BC: Resources
October 2750 BC: Resources
December 2750 BC: New Technology
January 2749 BC: Diplomacy
January 2749 BC: Diplomacy
January 2749 BC: Harvest

January 2749 BC

We have had enough rain to support an average harvest.



[from top] Setting up your army is as tactically sound as playing checkers; Check your message screen…or else you might not notice a city has fallen to the enemy; How this economic model works is never explained, you just buy or sell in a static economy.

IT NEVER COMES as a surprise that follow-ups to successful historical-based games tend to jump around a bit in history. Rather than move forward, game developers often look further in the past for inspiration for a "sequel." Such is the case with *Chariots of War*, the follow-up to *Legion*, which focuses on the ancient wars in the Middle East where the key players of Egypt, Assyria, Babylon, and Judea battled for a thousand years. Due to its lack of refinement you might end up yelling, "Holy Moses" faster than you can shake a burning bush.

Set in the time of great Biblical strife, this single-player only game places you in charge of one of more than 50 mini-nations, including the aforementioned "famous" powers, as well as some that didn't exactly stand the test of time. Each nation has its own unique unit of sorts to help balance things out, but the choice of nation isn't terribly important. Because it starts at the dawn of time, it forces you to rely on a collection of peasant rabble and poorly trained auxiliary troops anyway in your early conquests, but as you successfully conquer nearby lands various special troops will soon be available to fill your ranks.

The gameplay is similar to *Medieval: Total War*, where you control your nation's development and progress in a turn-based fashion on a grand strategic scale. Additionally, it seems that the developer took a page from Sid Meier's own *Civilization* bible, giving you the opportunity to individually upgrade and expand each city. You can trade goods and sell off those items you have in great abundance, or purchase what you need to keep your society growing. The economic model is simplistic at best, so you can't flood the market to lower prices drastically or horde important resources. Keeping your civilian population happy is also crucial. The better you feed and less you tax your people the happier, and thus more productive they will become and the less likely to revolt. With the diverse powers to play, a growing empire to manage and armies to build, *Chariots of War* should be a great historical epic. However the lack of interface polish, rather flat graphics, and limited unit animation result in a "made for TV" style appearance rather than a big screen blockbuster. This would be acceptable except for the fact that the combat mode is utterly problematic.

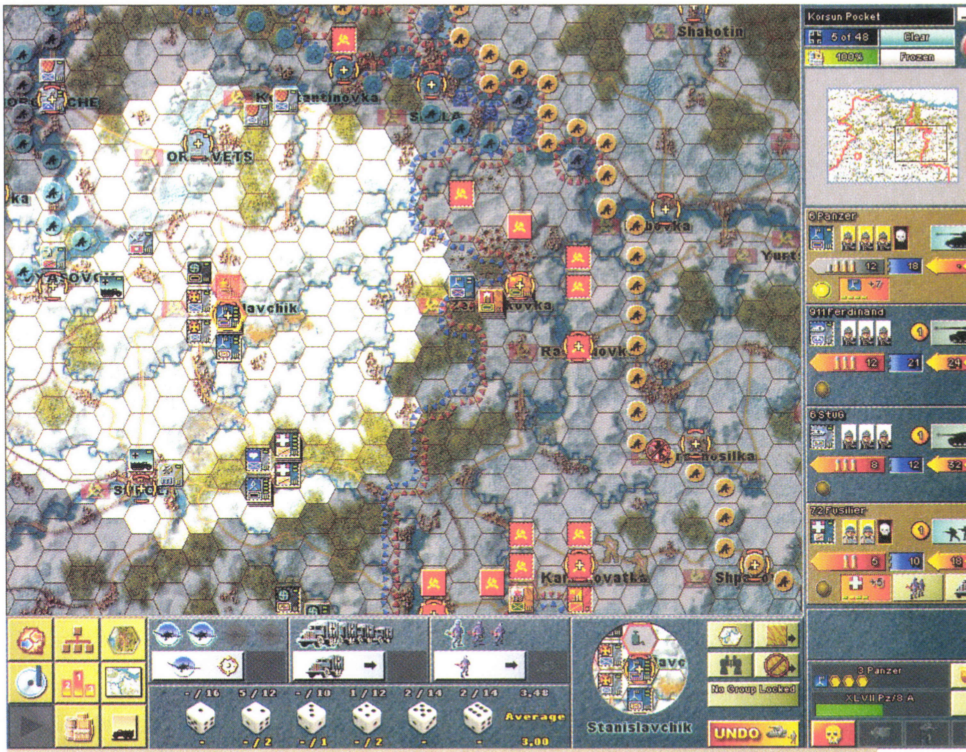
The quasi-real-time combat of *Legion* was that game's biggest downside, and nothing has changed with *Chariots of War*. Unlike the *Total War* series, where you control your units on a grand and lush battlefield, *Chariots of War* utilizes a flat 2D battlefield to set up your forces. You can choose where units are placed and give them a few brief orders, such as to charge or engulf their enemies, but precious little else. At times you don't even know the size of the enemy's strength or their exact position. While this is there to no doubt add challenge to the game, it isn't close to tactically realistic.

The action combat takes place in an equally flat 3D setting where it is virtually impossible to tell who is who. As you watch the battle play out in real-time, you have absolutely no control over any of your units. Obviously, in this era, commands weren't relayed effectively to the battlefield, but generals still had ways of pulling their forces back to avoid a total rout, and armies could adapt as necessary. In this game your armies follow orders to the letter even if it means marching straight into disaster.

Worse still, you don't even have the option to hold the line or wait for the enemy to come to you. Instead, both sides walk out to the middle of the map and fight until one side's forces finally flee and retire from the battle. The losing force is completely destroyed, no matter its size or how many men fled rather than be killed. A close and hard-fought battle can certainly change the entire course of the game, and this turns *Chariots of War* into yet another exercise where you're all but forced to save before every big battle, thus ruining the excitement of truly conquering the known world.

Other problems include diplomats that essentially do nothing except tell you which nations hate each other. The manual says that this was an era when no one trusted each other, and thus there are no treaties and no "declarations" of war—at any point you can expect to be attacked. You can't make agreements with other nations to gang up on powerful nations or even buy off would-be attackers. Instead you have to build up and hope that you aren't attacked from every direction. While this sounds like it should be fun, it's just tedious. *Chariots of War* requires too much of an investment in time to get to the interesting parts, and by then it's too late—the thrill is gone. *—Peter Suciu*

DEVELOPER Paradox Entertainment
PUBLISHER Strategy First • ESRB Teen



Advancing Soviet infantry stumble into a battalion of German armor

Decisive Battles of World War II: Korsun Pocket

Dice, dice, baby

★★★★☆

WITH *KORSUN POCKET*, SSG returns to a genre that "died" long before flight sims and adventure games: traditional wargames. You know, with hexes, counters, CRTs: the works. There are even dice to decide who wins a combat. That's right, computer-generated graphics of rolling six-sided dice.

Korsun Pocket is about an ill-fated German advance in the Ukraine in World War II. The Germans were stalled at the Dnepr River and then attacked on both flanks. They lost nearly 100,000 men. SSG has built this game on the same basic system they used in 1997's *Ardennes Offensive*, which is updated and included here. Although this extra battle gives *Korsun Pocket* a bit more variety than the traditional style of one box/one battle, it would have been nice to see more battles and maps like SSG's earlier wargames. Unfortunately, it's hard to imagine anyone but *grognards* getting excited about a single battle, particularly one that doesn't have the name recognition of Stalingrad or Kursk.

There's a lot of stuff in here—rules for artillery support, the interplay between armor and anti-tank weapons, flanking, minefields, infantry detachments, air interdiction, and so forth—but it's not at the level of detail you'll find in wargames by Gary Grigsby or John Tiller. Instead, it's all created with the type of easily understood abstractions you'd find in a board game. The whole thing fits together elegantly, quickly becoming intuitive and fluid, which isn't something you can say about many computer wargames. This isn't about using the power of a computer to crunch a million calculations about shell size, penetration value, and armor angle, just because it can; this is about being so easily understood that everything comes down to that fateful die roll. And as such, this is traditional wargaming at its best. *—Tom Chick*

DEVELOPER SSG • PUBLISHER Matrix Games
ESRB Not Rated

The Sims Superstar

Lifestyles of the rich, famous, and simulated

★★★★½

COMPUTER GAMES EDITOR'S CHOICE

THE SIMS SUPERSTAR steps up the interpersonal interaction of the original *Sims* by adding another dimension to the game: the pursuit of fame and fortune. Check out the tabloids delivered with your daily newspaper to read about who's hot or not, or find an agent for yourself. If you do, you can't hold a regular job. You have to make regular trips to Studio Town to wow the crowds at karaoke, or win the approval of directors once you've earned enough fame to get their attention. The pay isn't great at the low levels, but after all, you're suffering for your art, not looking for a profit, right?

If you just want to live the good life, *Sims Superstar* introduces the best amenity to the game since *Livin' Large* let players install more wallpaper: a butler. Alfred arrives promptly every morning, fixes meals, cleans, waters plants, calls for repair services, and leaves at midnight. No more wasting valuable time on household chores, though at $500 a day, he's not cheap. But he's completely worth it.

Relationships are more challenging than in previous versions. In "the biz," the more famous you get, the less your friends can relate to you—unless they're famous too, of course, or asking you for an autograph. If you're a "Nobody" yourself, expect to get snubbed, even by the paparazzi. Achieving "Studio Insider" gets you a little more leeway, and as a "Name Dropper," even the omnipresent photographers might take a picture or two. You can even become a "Sell Out," at which point people spontaneously come up to you asking for an autograph, and an Obsessed Fan comes to your house, hangs around, and takes out the trash. In Studio Town, you might even see somebody you know; *Sims: Superstar* has integrated cultural icons such as Marilyn Monroe into the game, as well as extended the fifteen minutes of Avril Lavigne and other celebs of today.

Hot vacation spots and cute little puppies are nice, but as with *Hot Date*, *The Sims Superstar* brings the game to another new level of entertainment and challenge.
—Jessica Theon

DEVELOPER Maxis • *PUBLISHER* EA Games
ESRB Teen

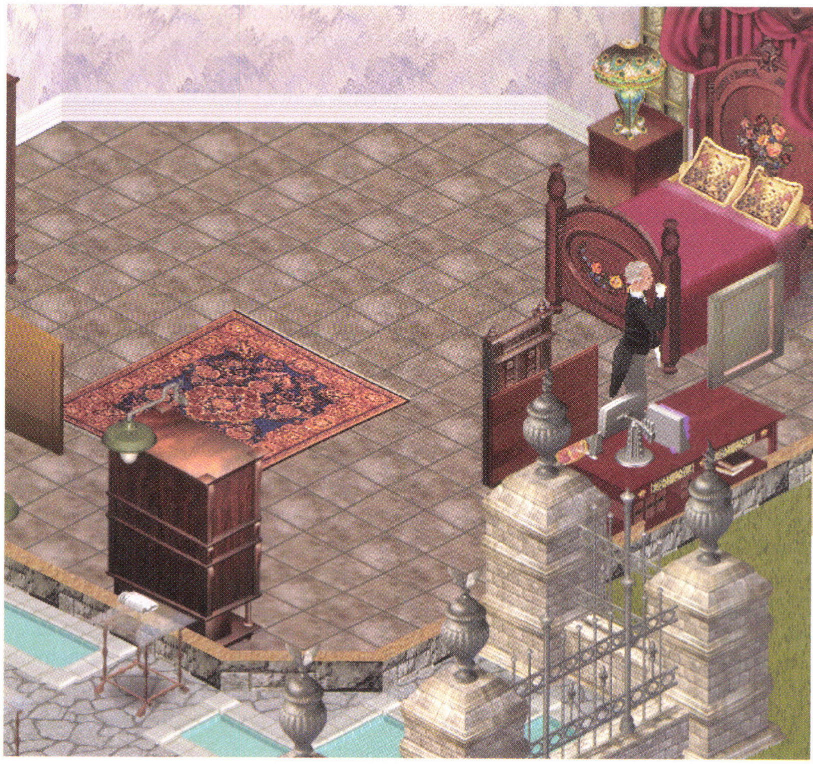
Blitzkrieg

Another mediocre trek through WWII

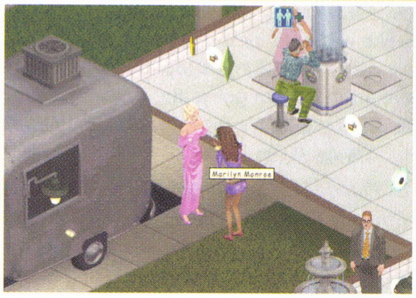
★★★☆☆

THERE ARE TWO great unresolved mysteries of World War II, or rather World War II games. The first is why so many real-time tactical simulations seem to be coming out of Eastern Europe with disturbing regularity, and the second is why these games have as much realism as a re-run of *Hogan's Heroes*. They feature accurate vehicles and sometimes get the settings right, but that is where the realistic take on WWII ends. Now one of the latest titles blitzkriegs to the frontlines, and it happens to be called *Blitzkrieg*.

Does this part sound familiar? You get to play through three full campaigns that recreate the titanic struggle in Europe in the years 1939-1945, playing as the Germans, Soviets, or Allies. You get a set amount of troops, vehicles, and other equipment to carry out specific tasks before heading to the next mission. Your efforts on the battlefield result in commendations, including medals and promotions. While the game is based on real-



Alfred the Butler attends to your every need; [below] Marilyn Monroe signs an autograph.



world settings and situations, you actually take part in a series of purely generic engagements and often use armored vehicles and other troops that aren't fully appropriate to the situation.

There you have it. *Blitzkrieg* heads to the frontlines with the same approach as the more recent *Sudden Strike* and *WWII: Panzer Claws*, even though *Close Combat* showed how it should be done right. *Blitzkrieg* actually stands out for getting a lot more right than it does wrong in terms of settings, while hitting upon some solid unit balance and quick-paced gameplay. Most notable is that it manages to get history right, while following a campaign that covers the broad strokes of the Second World War. Many key battles are missing, and the game sort of plays out like a *Cliff's Notes* version of the big one. But there is a nice sampling of the key eras of the war including the usually overlooked Soviet-Finnish Winter War and even Germany's invasion of Poland.

Even more important is that developer Nival balances the units with realistic attributes for the different powers' armor, and the result is much more than just unique artwork with equally matched units. Don't expect that trusty Allied Sherman tank to go head-to-head with a Tiger in this game, because the developers finally realized that this shouldn't be possible. You also won't see teams of bazooka troops running about or tank rushes that mow down the lowly infantry. Combined arms and unit support are the keys to success.

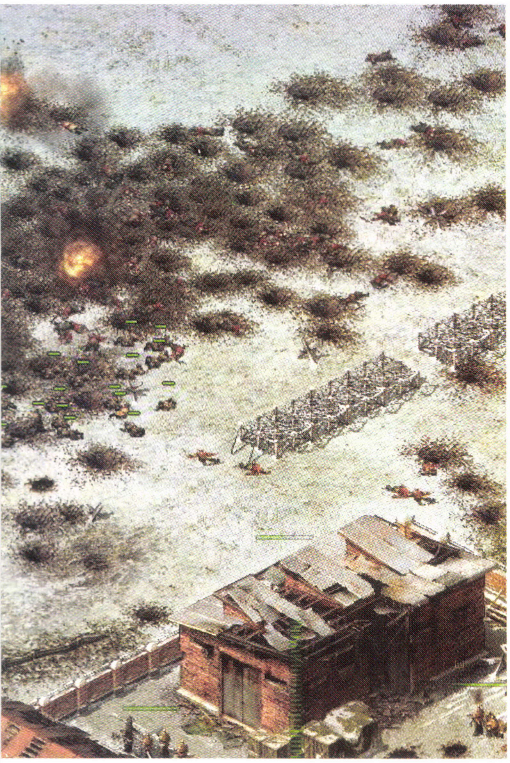
On the downside, the interface is almost too simplistic. You can give your troops a variety of orders but everything is just far too basic. Infantry can crawl, run, or march, and have a defensive or aggressive posture; but little is done with morale or advanced tactics like flanking and ambush. It handles line-of-sight and weapon range poorly; you can either see units, or not. As a result, you can expect incoming fire without the most basic notion of where to look.

As with many previous WWII titles, *Blitzkrieg* suffers from unit identification problems. There are excellent renderings of individual armored units, trucks, and planes, and the game really goes the extra mile in terms of delivering smooth animations. But the lack of zoom or camera control means that you can't really appreciate the finer details. Worse, figuring out soldier types at a glance is impossible. On the snow maps the modeling stands out a bit more, but in the desert you might as well be looking at 2D sprites!

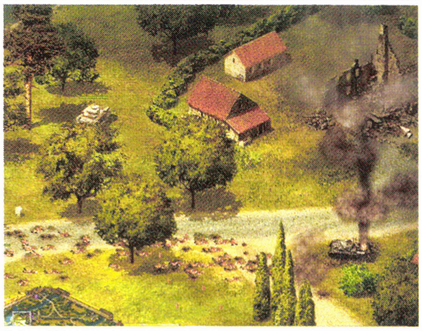
Blitzkrieg does have some subtle points that the competition fails to roll out, including ultra-detailed and specific briefings, along with real-world awards for your courageous efforts on the field of battle instead of just another generic Iron Cross. Combined with the challenging, yet balanced AI opposition, and varied settings, it's essentially a solid but all too basic game. The presentation really belongs to a much deeper experience.

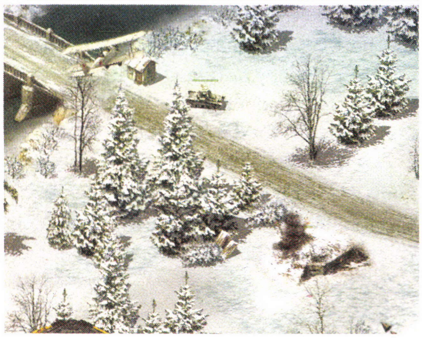
This isn't the last of the WWII tactical simulations, not by a long shot. With many more titles on the way to the frontlines, most of which will provide better 3D graphics and greater control options, *Blitzkrieg* is probably only really worth a look for wargamers who tend to give all of these style of games a look. For everyone else, it's another forgettable skirmish in a history book filled with truly famous battles.
—Peter Suciu

DEVELOPER Nival Interactive • PUBLISHER CDV • ESRB Teen

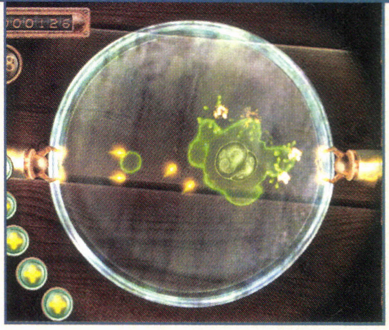


[left] Blood-soaked snow, shell-scared landscape...it must be Stalingrad!; [below] The early Allied missions in France 1940 are almost no fun at all; The Winter War was a sideshow of World War II, but an important tutorial for Blitzkrieg.



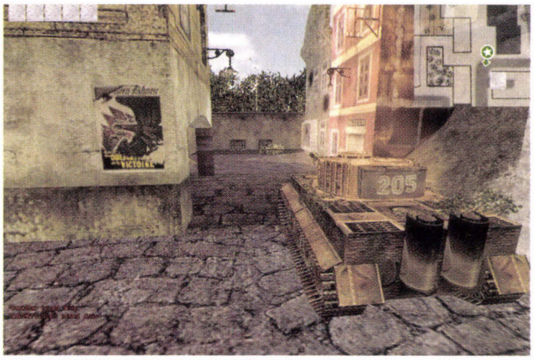


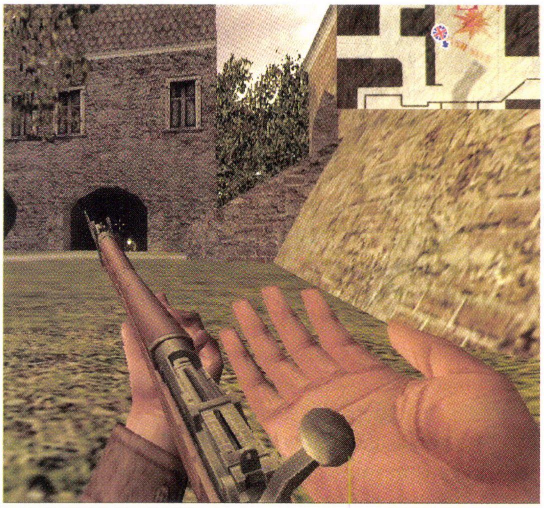
spotlight

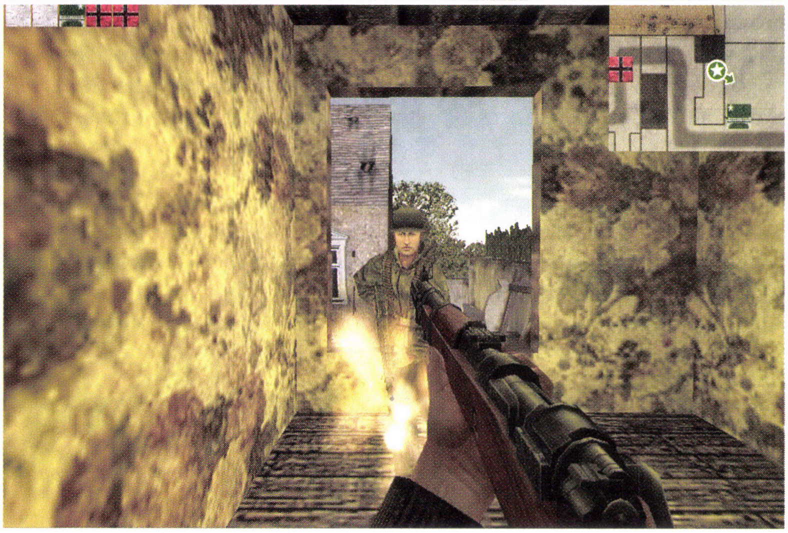


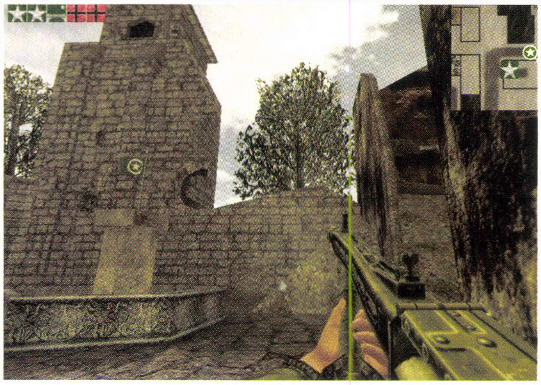
Squishy

Those "Cheapass" guys from Digital Eel are back with *Dr. Blob's Organism*, a strange combination of *Star Castle*, *Tempest*, and that old "Game of Life" demo. It has a deep plot—you shoot a blob of slime in the middle of a petri dish—but the gameplay is as addictive as the sound effects are squishy. It has 20 levels, powerups, "special blob abilities," and 21 music tracks. It's another quality little game from the folks that made *Strange Adventures in Infinite Space,* and is recommended for those looking for a simple shooter fix. [Cheapass Games, www.cheapass.com]









[clockwise from left] The tank looks neat, but unfortunately it's not drivable; Reloading manually and no ammo to run over for a refill? This is not Quake III; That's one of the flags you either have to capture or protect, depending on your side; Many of the battles take place in extremely close quarters.

Day of Defeat

Putting a price tag on WWII

★ ★ ★ ★ ☆

PERHAPS NO OTHER game has had more successful mods written for it than *Half-Life*. According to GameSpy, *Counter-Strike* consistently ranks in the top three online games at any given moment, and more often than not, it's number one. It only makes sense, then, that Valve has greenlighted a commercial release of *Day of Defeat*, the second most popular mod from its venerable franchise. It seems a little passé today, but in late 1999 and early 2000 when its creators first released it to the community, its WWII theme was fresh and exciting. Although there are still a few rough edges, the experience has been developed and polished to a high gloss.

Players can choose to be on the American, German, or newly included British side. Each is chock full of authentic weaponry and appropriate voice work, and players are free to choose from several classes. (Strangely, the British only get four classes while the other sides have seven each.) Where *Day of Defeat* is perhaps better than the plethora of WWII games available now is in the class balance. Nearly everyone plays a vital role in the game, and no one class or side has an enormous advantage over the others. Considering this is a team-based game, the balancing system is a tight-wire walk, and the developers do an amazing job keeping their footing.

While the game supports built-in voice communication, it's more a static mess than a useful tool at this point. (You're free to use *Roger Wilco, TeamSound,* or any of the other available voice chat programs.) Luckily, if you don't have a headset/microphone, or you don't want to talk to anyone, there are plenty of built-in hotkeys for communicating the most important aspects of what is going on. It's not nearly as robust as the chat system incorporated into *Tribes 2*, but it's more than sufficient for the job requirement.

Day of Defeat ships with fifteen maps, three exclusive to the purchased game; and the map determines the style of game. There is no deathmatch; rather, you're either playing a hold-and-destroy style game (Normandy, for example) or a virtual tug of war involving multiple flags placed throughout the map (like Caen). While the maps are usually well laid out and fairly believable, they just cannot keep up aesthetically with the likes of *Battlefield 1942*, *Medal of Honor*, or *Return to Castle Wolfenstein*. The character models and weapons are realistic and look nice, but the maps are all very angular and rather bland. A few of the outdoor ones, particularly the forest, are simply ugly.

Day of Defeat still has incredibly good gameplay, and with things like realistic gun recoil and the near requirement to stand still or go prone for any sort of firing accuracy, it's much more difficult than most WWII games. It's not 100% realistic by any means, but this style of play is not for the run-and-gun crowd. Teamwork is key to victory, as solo players do not last long. Since many have been playing for a few years now, there's some initial struggle for new players, but as with most teamwork-based games perseverance and patience lead to an incredibly deep game.

But can't you just download this game for free? Well, yes, for the most part. Besides the retail package's exclusive maps, it's also a stand-alone product—you do not have to own *Half-Life* to play. You also don't have to download the massive files required to play. All the changes in the retail version work with the free one, but if you're intent on single-player action, make sure you download the available bot mods. (Why didn't the game ship with this obvious mod?)

As a new retail game, *Day of Defeat* certainly looks dated, and if you've been playing the downloadable version for a few years, there's little reason to purchase the retail edition. However, if you never tried the mod or you don't own *Half-Life*, this is a game that screams good gameplay and more than justifies its $30 price. The player base is already huge, and once you're in the middle of a firefight, you completely forget you're in an older graphics engine. For a change, design, playability, and community are the clear winners. —*Kevin Rice*

DEVELOPER *Valve Software* • PUBLISHER *Activision* • ESRB *Teen*

The Hulk

Not so smashing

★★½☆☆

IF YOU CAN derive any universal truth from the game version of Ang Lee's *Hulk* movie, it's that breaking stuff is cool. And *Hulk* lets you break a lot of stuff—glass shatters, walls and floors crack, doors explode off their hinges, etc. For the first couple of levels, that's nearly enough to make this is a thoroughly enjoyable romp. But like *Enter the Matrix*, the majority of the six or seven hours of gameplay involves running through incredibly dull areas fighting the exact same battle every few minutes.

That's probably the legacy of getting a game out simultaneously with a movie; you lose the ability to vary the gameplay. You have to figure out the quickest way to X amount of hours of play, and that usually involves repetition. Lots of repetition. *Hulk* isn't any better or worse than, say, the highly regarded *Spider-Man* games from Activision, but as game designs, they're really something of a step backward.

In *Hulk*, you're mean and you're green, alternating between boring, stealthy-missions as Bruce Banner, and Hulk-tastic smash-a-thons. Each level is brutally linear, but the combat initially makes up for the dullness of the environments. The Hulk can pretty much destroy everything and pick up any debris or object in the environment and wield it as a weapon. He can also pick up bad guys, smack them around, slam them on the ground, or throw them at other people. It's initially entertaining, but it quickly becomes dull and predictable.

The PC port is pretty shoddy, with problems switching resolutions (shared on both an ATI Radeon and GeForceFX) and a keyboard interface that doesn't make use of the mouse at all (it's considerably better to play with an analog gamepad). The production values throughout are incredibly high, with excellent cel-shaded graphics, quality cut scenes, and solid voice acting from movie Hulk Eric Bana. There are plenty of clever touches, including a cheat code that lets you play the game as the original gray Hulk, but overall it's an uninspired effort, the kind of competent, workmanlike, and by-the-numbers type of product Hollywood itself churns out. —*Steve Bauman*

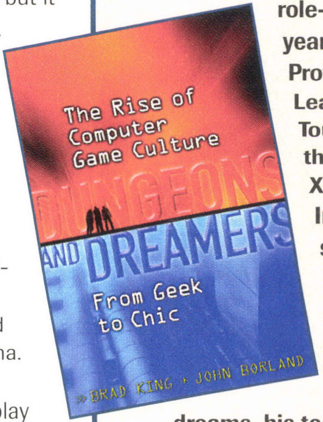
DEVELOPER *Radical Entertainment* • PUBLISHER *Vivendi Universal* • ESRB *Teen*

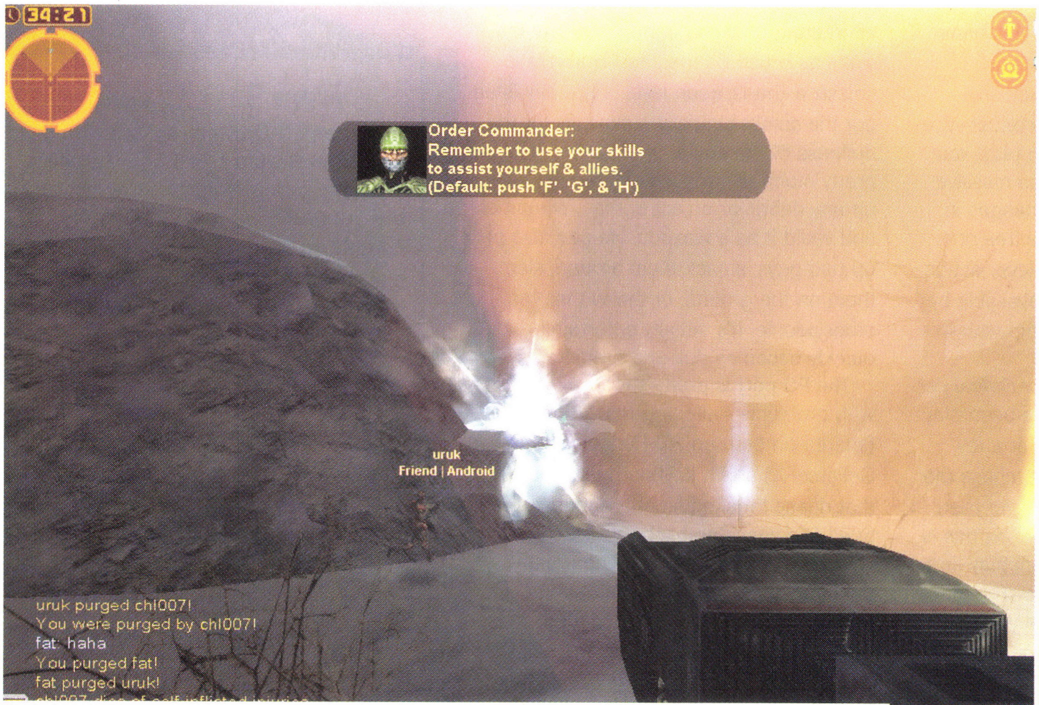
You won't like this guy when he's angry; Hulk smash!

spotlight

From Geek to Chic

Dungeons & Dreams, by Brad King and John Borland, is a light but surprisingly compelling exploration of the computer games industry and its culture. It chronicles the rise of electronic entertainment from its early days as influenced by tabletop role-playing, to last year's Cyberathlete Professional League Tournament and the emergence of Xbox Live. Initially, the story seems to be a narrative about a boy named Richard—his hopes, his dreams, his technical genius—and it wraps up with where he ended up a quarter of a century later. In between, it delves into what the authors believe are the important milestones in the history of computer gaming, but it doesn't read like a "history textbook." Instead, it's quite anecdotal, with stories about and quotes from industry standards such as Gary Gygax, Dave Arneson, John Carmack, Will Wright, John Romero, "Thresh," and more. While it makes no broad claims about who gamers are or why they play, the storybook treatment of its topic manages anyway to provide an interestingly astute portrait of the hobbyists' collective psyche. [McGraw-Hill]

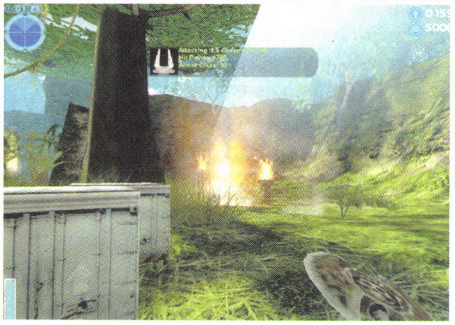




Order Commander:
Remember to use your skills
to assist yourself & allies.
(Default: push 'F', 'G', & 'H')

uruk purged chl007!
You were purged by chl007!
fat: haha
You purged fat!
fat purged uruk!

150
250
0078



PURGE: [above] Purge this! [below] Protect your portal...and destroy theirs.

Purge

...this game from your hard drive

★★☆☆☆

THE INTERNET HAS been a springboard for small games to propel themselves to huge heights. Cult classics like *Counter-Strike* and *Team Fortress* have all but owned the online shooter market despite humble origins, outgunning numerous would-be usurpers who have come packing bigger budgets and considerably more PR hoopla. It gives hope to the little guys that they can possibly compete, given the right game and the right circumstances. This is the battle cry of games like *Purge*, to start small and end big. The problem is that *Purge* ain't no *Counter-Strike*, and it just ain't that good.

Purge is a team-based online shooter with some serious role-playing elements under the hood. The backstory, what there is of it, is a paper-thin tale of a war in the future between magic and technology. You play the game in rounds with each of the two teams, the technological Order and the magical Chosen, trying to fight their way to the other team's base to destroy their portal. Each side has four classes to choose from, all of which come equipped with a variety of weaponry and support skills designed to necessitate teamwork over twitchiness. What's more, each class can be customized by raising and lowering the different core attributes like strength, agility, and intelligence.

While this sounds like a nifty little idea, it can't pull it off. It plays sort of like *Team Fortress* on crack, with a lot of visual flash provided by a new version of the Lithtech engine, but not a lot of substance when it comes to gameplay. Weapon and class balance is questionable at best, and the action just isn't smooth. It's no real surprise that nobody is playing this game—it's unusual to find more than a handful of people playing online at any given time—making it even more difficult to recommend *Purge* in any way, shape, or form.
—Adam Fleet

DEVELOPER Freeform Interactive • PUBLISHER Tri Synergy • ESRB Mature

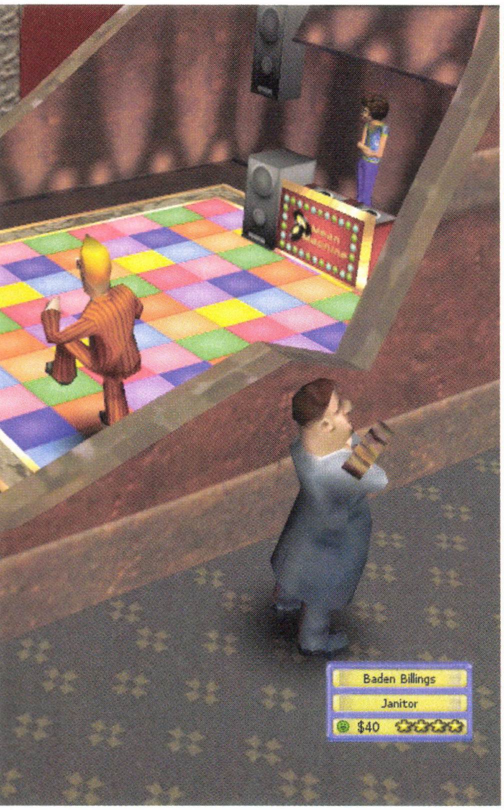
Casino, Inc.

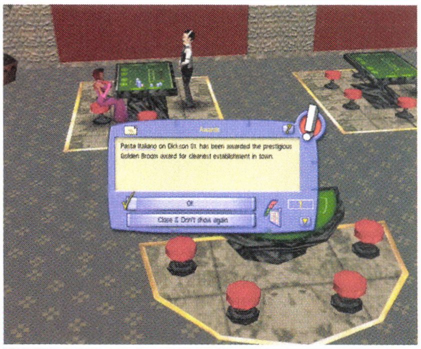
Know when to fold 'em

★★☆☆☆

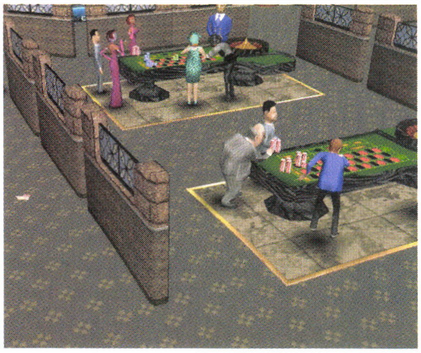
WHY IS IT so difficult to make an interesting casino strategy game? It's a great concept, but *Casino, Inc.* joins Sierra's underachieving *Casino Empire* in the "not quite" category. While it has personality, it's also homely, and despite the welcome addition of a bit of sleaze, it focuses on the more mundane parts of running a casino.

The premise is typically simple: build up





Pasta Italiano on Dickson St. has been awarded the prestigious Golden Broom award for cleanest establishment in town.



CASINO, INC. : People have needs, and in the fashion of old Bullfrog games, they appear over people's heads; You're often distracted from whatever you're doing by something else that also requires your micromangement skills; You can cruise the town to see what people walking around are looking for; Zooming in up close is fairly useless but nice for screenshots.

a casino. It gives you various objectives, you place tables and various other amenities, hire and fire staff, and try to lure certain types of customers. Go upscale to get the high rollers, or keep it cheap for the tourists. Men and women may each look for some hot sex from someone of the opposite or same sex, so you might want some "workers" around to fulfill that particular need.

The best example of this kind of game remains *RollerCoaster Tycoon*, and *Casino, Inc.* puts way too much emphasis on mundane busywork instead of letting you observe and control more of the big picture. It also lacks the personality that makes Chris Sawyer's gem such a joy to play. The 3D graphics in *Casino, Inc.* are decent, and there's little doubt that old women running around with an icon over their heads saying they need some hot man sex is inherently funny, but there's something missing—it's just not tacky enough. It should revel in the glorious awfulness that is Vegas and casinos.

There's a lot of depth, but it all gets bogged down with incredibly not fun minutia. Instead of observing and tweaking, you're constantly juggling running the floor, dealing with staffing, advertising, working out routes to get people from the airport to your casino, buying new buildings for additional casinos… it's just too much, particularly with a bad 3D camera and an obscure interface that requires you to memorize tiny icons. If you don't play the game for a few days or weeks, you practically have to relearn everything because nothing is intuitive. And learning it once is more than enough. *—Steve Bauman*

DEVELOPER Hothouse Creations
PUBLISHER Konami • ESRB Mature

CODENAME: NINA *ValuSoft/Mature* ★½ Powered by a four-year old version of the Lithtech engine, this bad 3D action budgetware game is ugly and as boring as the performance of the actor who voices the lead character. Trying to figure out her accent of indeterminate origin (Eastern European Queen's English?) is more interesting than the game itself, which features dull levels, no saves, and pretty much nothing of interest. You know you're in for a quality experience when the game itself isn't sure of its own name—it's *Codename: Nina—Global Terrorism Strike Force* on the box, and *Nina: Agent Chronicles* on its icon, install folder, and the main menu. *—SB*

ROLLERCOASTER TYCOON 2: WACKY WORLDS *Atari/Everyone* ★½ If *RollerCoaster Tycoon 2* was a bit too much "more of the same," its first expansion is even more of the same of more of the same. Inexplicably priced identically to the full game, it adds a few new scenarios and rides, some theming restricted to certain scenarios, and little else. There's little question this is a fantastic series of games, but this is a seriously lame expansion. *—SB*

bargain bin

Celtic Kings: Rage of War

This wasn't just the best game that you never played last year, it was the best game that nobody played. The D.O.A. *Diablo* clone sold just a few thousand copies, so this product from Haemimont Games and Strategy First is now available for five bucks, which is a great deal since this is a *Diablo* clone with plucky Gauls who don't resemble Asterix, and an appealing mash of real-time strategy and role-playing. [Strategy First/2002]

All the Buzz

*Built for LAN parties, the **Monarch Hornet** is small but noisy*

★★★½☆

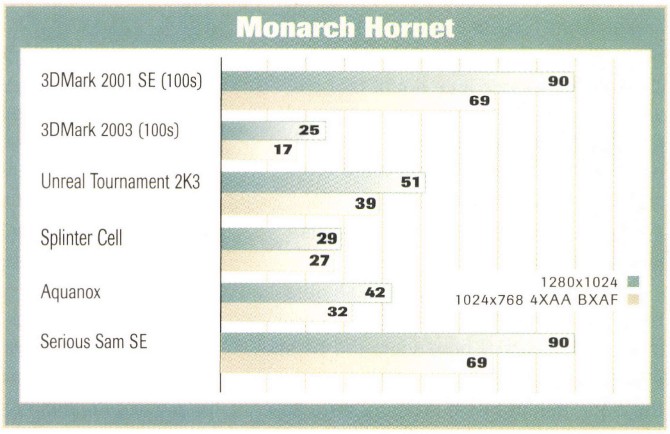
BY JASON CROSS

ONE OF THE newest and coolest trends in home computers is small form factor designs. These diminutive PCs, like Shuttle's popular XPS line, are small and light enough to quickly pick up and carry around, but they don't sacrifice too much in the way of performance. Now the venerable manufacturer Monarch Computer Systems is getting into the game with a new custom case of its own design, ideally suited for gamers that regularly attend LAN parties or just like to have their PCs on top of their desks, not under them.

At just under 11 inches wide, a bit over 9 inches tall, and about 13 inches deep, it's not much bigger than a toaster oven. Shuttle XPS systems are smaller, but Monarch's design permits more possibilities—it accommodates any FlexATX size motherboard, has three PCI slots in addition to the AGP one, and can hold two hard drives in addition to the one optical drive and floppy. That means that RAID is an option, though our test system only used one 80GB Serial ATA drive. It is otherwise very well equipped, while keeping in a modest budget. A 2.6GHz Pentium 4 with 800MHz bus, a full gig of DDR400 RAM, ATI's mid-range 9600 Pro, and even an Audigy 2 are all crammed very neatly into this little box, along with a decent Samsung DVD/CDRW. You can configure a top-end system with the fastest parts, but this setup was about $1,600, which included a very nice Logitech keyboard and that fantastic MX700 cordless optical mouse. Athlon XP based units, and even bare-bones configurations are available as well.

A few interesting touches include a slide-out motherboard tray that makes it easier to work on things without squeezing your hands into that tiny case, removable side panels (with optional transparent window and even internal lighting), two ugly but useful digital temperature monitors on the front, and even a handle. After all, the whole thing weighs about 10 pounds so it begs to be carried around. By default, these Hornet systems come with a large, dumb looking sticker on the front: a half-boy, half-wasp holding a joystick, which you can choose to replace with a Monarch logo if you feel like providing free advertising, or, for a $5 surcharge, leave totally blank. That's right, it costs more to leave it blank.

Performance is about what you'd expect from a system with these specs, and is comparable to full-sized desktop systems with similar parts. It's a very reasonably-priced PC that with enough power to play all those cool upcoming shooters and online role-playing games, will do you proud at any LAN party frag fest. That's the silver lining. The cloud surrounding it is this: the small power



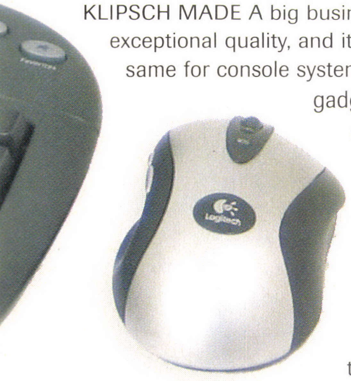
supply also has a small fan, which must spin at very high speeds to keep things cool, and this creates a lot of noise—way too much noise—enough to annoy everyone sitting nearby. It's not quite as bad as the first GeForce FX card, but it's unacceptable for a system meant to sit on top of your desk, and optimized to carry around to social gatherings. While it's easy to love any affordable, compact, gaming PC, it's too loud and too unattractive to earn top marks. *—Jason Cross*

MANUFACTURER Monarch Computer Systems • MSRP $1,604

Klipsch ProMedia GMX D-5.1

More for your TV than your PC

★★★½☆



KLIPSCH MADE A big business out of building PC speakers of exceptional quality, and its GMX set is an attempt to do the same for console systems, DVD players, and all those other gadgets you hook up to your TV. The styling is sort of "'50s vision of the future" retro, which you either love or hate, but the satellites certainly look distinct.

The controller is a bit of a problem. The flat round disc sits over seven inches around, and contains left/right analog inputs, coaxial and optical digital inputs, an output to the subwoofer, and a power jack. It's really only suitable to keep near your TV, perhaps on top of your DVD player or console. But you'll need a clear view of the top to adjust volume, change modes, etc. It's just not a great design, and the lack of a remote, even if only for volume, makes practical use in the living room a bit clunky. At least it handles decoding for Dolby 5.1 and Pro Logic II, and offers a five-channel stereo as well.

The sound quality is really excellent for a $300 set of 5.1 speakers, with clear, accurate sounds that let you pick out every nuance from your games and movies and gets loud enough for just about any modest living room. The bottom end is a little on the weak side, but Klipsch is offering a deal right now where it's throwing in one of its ProMedia SWS add-on subwoofers, a cool little 100-watt package that can be used to add bass to any setup. The combo is a great deal at $300, but it's unclear how long they'll continue the special offer.

The GMX 5.1 system doesn't pull double duty with your PC very well. The only analog inputs are left/right RCA jacks, and the digital outputs on many common cards, like recent SoundBlasters, only send out a proprietary signal for their own PC speakers and thus won't give you 5.1 audio. Those with nForce motherboards with Dolby Digital encoding should be fine, though. Ultimately, while these are great sounding speakers, they're not a great choice for your PC. *—Jason Cross*

MANUFACTURER Klipsch • MSRP $299

tip OF THE month

Kill the Built-in .zip Support

If you use your own program to manage .zip files and want to totally kill Windows XP's built-in support, just go to the Run menu, type: regsvr32 /u %windir%\system32\zipfldr.dll and click OK. You may need to restart Windows to see the full effect. To get it back, just type: regsvr32 %windir%\system32\zipfldr.dll in the Run menu.

HARDWARE TEST PLATFORM Unless otherwise stated, the base platform for all listed benchmarks is as follows: **PROCESSOR** Pentium 4 3.06HT **RAM** 512MB PC1066 RAMBUS **MOTHERBOARD** Intel D850EMV2 (i850 chipset) **HARD DRIVE** Maxtor DiamondMax Plus 60 **AUDIO** Sound Blaster Audigy 2

Q&A questions & answers

Setting up that fancy new 5.1 system for optimum sound isn't that hard, but picking which system to buy can be confusing. If a technical problem has you scratching your head, just drop us a line at *qa@cgonline.com.*

Q: I just bought myself an Audigy 2 and got everything all back together when it dawned on me that my little 2.1 speaker setup wasn't giving me the benefit of my new soundcard. I'm baffled by the wide variety of speaker choices available and am unable to make a decision. I know you guys do some reviews of hardware and was wondering if a tip on a speaker set would be too much to ask. I have no problem paying the $400 for the top-of-the-line stuff if it's actually more than $100 better than the other stuff. Is 5.1 fine and 6.1 a waste? Then there's the issue of how to place them. Help!! I want to start jamming to games and music, but I don't want that nagging feeling in my gut for months to come, that I spent too much for too little.

Doug B.

A: *The top two choices for high-end speakers right now are Logitech's Z-680 5.1 and Klipsch's ProMedia 5.1 speakers, both of which cost about $400. If you'd like to go a little lower, the Logitech Z-560 setup is a 4.1 solution that will only set you back $200. If you go with Creative's speakers, I would look to the Megaworks brand rather than the Inspire line, which is their low-power budget brand. Don't worry about 6.1 really, it doesn't make much of a difference over 5.1, and nobody really wants to string even more speaker wire all over the room.*

Setup should be pretty easy. With a 5.1 speaker setup, just put the center channel somewhere right next to your monitor (some are even made to fit neatly beneath or above it). Put the left and right front speakers on the back corners of your desk, at least a couple feet to the sides of your monitor if it's at all possible. The left and right rear (or "surround") speakers should go on your flanks, anywhere from the 4 o'clock to 5 o'clock position for the right, and the 7 o'clock and 8 o'clock position for the left. The subwoofer can be placed out of the way, off in a corner somewhere or down underneath your desk or whatever—really low frequency sound is omnidirectional and so placement isn't as important there.

Most of all, just trust your ears. Use the Audigy 2's speaker setup utility to listen to the sounds from all your speakers, making sure that you don't have one that's too quiet, or too far to the left, or whatever. It's really quite easy, the hardest part is messing with all that annoying speaker wire.

A really good set of speakers can improve your games immeasurably.

Q: I am considering purchasing an inexpensive pair of computer speakers and was wondering if anyone knew what a P.M.P.O. power rating is.

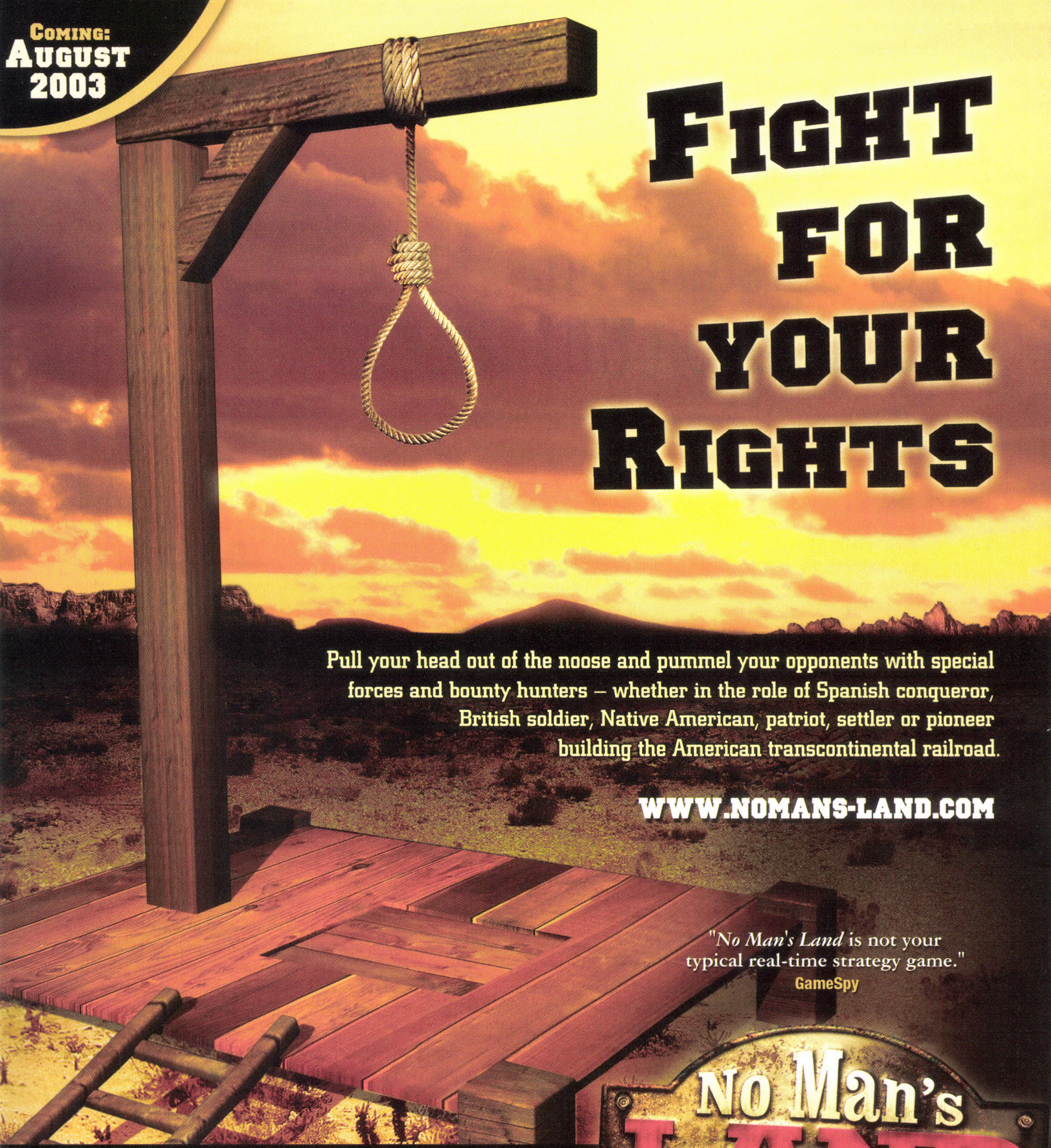
Adam W.

A: *That particular acronym stands for "Peak Music Power Output" and it seems like something specifically designed by marketing types to make crappy speakers look a lot more powerful than they really are. There's no exact standard for how this value should be measured, so it's totally worthless as a metric of anything. A more reliable measure of speaker power is "RMS" power, but even that is usually measured at some idealistic peak by marketing departments, and has more to do with putting a big number on the box than actually giving you a true indication of how powerful a set of speakers is. RMS power is, at least, computed in a fairly standard manner.*

Q: I'm getting a new computer in the next couple of weeks, and it's really a hot hot system. The only tiny uncertainty about the thing is, the operating system is Windows XP Pro. Can XP Pro game? I know that there are games out there for XP, although I hear that even XP Home might give me a problem with a lot of my existing games. The "Pro" scares me a bit. Can you, maybe, allay my trepidation a little… I hope?

J. S.

A: *A hot system huh? You really shouldn't buy stolen computer equipment. Seriously though, Windows XP Pro will be just fine for games. It's basically the same as XP Home in that regard, it's just got a few extra features like support for dual-processor systems, for instance. The only problems you should have with either version of Windows XP is with playing some old DOS games, some work and some don't.*



Pull your head out of the noose and pummel your opponents with special forces and bounty hunters – whether in the role of Spanish conqueror, British soldier, Native American, patriot, settler or pioneer building the American transcontinental railroad.

WWW.NOMANS-LAND.COM

"*No Man's Land* is not your typical real-time strategy game."
GameSpy

cdv
www.cdv-games.com

RD
RELATED DESIGNS

POWERED BY gamespy

GameSpy and the "Powered by Gamespy" design are trademarks of GameSpy Industries, Inc. All rights reserved.

RATING PENDING
RP
Visit www.esrb.org or call 1-800-771-3772 for more info.
CONTENT RATED BY ESRB

Visit www.esrb.org or call 1-800-771-3772 for Rating Information.

© 2003 CDV Software Entertainment AG.

Understanding Civilization (III)

The pros and cons of using computer games in the classroom

BY HENRY JENKINS AND KURT SQUIRE

Seemingly overnight, educational gaming has gone from something to be snickered at to a buzzword in education and industry. Maybe it's the widespread use for military training, or the increasing graphical realism, or maybe it's that so many young teachers grew up playing games. Today, the Sloan Foundation's Virtual University, the ICT's military simulations, or the MIT-Microsoft Games-to-Teach Project are beginning to explore computer games designed specifically for classroom use.

But what are players learning through gameplay already? Strategy games like *Capitalism* or *SimCity* help players grasp complex social systems. Others, like *Sid Meier's Gettysburg!* or *Patrician,* place players in historical scenarios. Still, we know very little about what happens when we bring games into schools. What are the effects of competition on classroom culture? How do players interpret their game experiences and apply them to the world around them? We need to understand more fully what happens to learning with games in the classroom, and to identify what specific properties games offer education.

> *"Imagine a world where learning ...through a game is as commonplace as learning through books or film."*

Over the past year, Kurt Squire has been studying how to teach high school and middle school social studies using *Civilization III.* Using its mod-building tools, Kurt created custom scenarios to teach global history, and then examined what students learned through gameplay.

For strategy gamers, this was a gift from the gaming gods. Building civilizations replaced listening to lectures, and managing vast empires replaced reading about them. But some non-strategy gamers were overwhelmed by the game's complexity; many aspects of the interface were completely foreign. Gamers have had to learn more than they realize just to play their favorite titles.

Once everyone got up to speed, amazing things happened. First, students used concepts such as infrastructure, natural resources, or isolationism to interpret and analyze game play. As students suffered defeats, they discovered the importance of geography. By the end, they were using gaming experiences as conceptual tools, explaining how a scarce natural resource such as oil could destabilize global politics. As one student commented: "What I learned is that you can't separate economics from politics or geography. What natural resources I have or where I'm located affects how I can negotiate with other civilizations."

World history textbooks typically present history as the story of Western Culture. Students come to think that our current global world order is the inevitable result of western progress. *Civilization III* takes a global, geographical approach to presenting history where players can test out different theories. The "what if" quality of the game allowed students to draw their own conclusions about such questions as how and why Europe colonized North America rather than the other way around. These students, mostly from minority backgrounds, read below grade level and struggled with social studies, yet developed sophisticated skills for thinking about history through playing the game. They learned to ask their own questions about the historical process.

On the other hand, few detected the game's geographical and materialist bias, or realized that it minimizes the role of historical figures and cultural factors. In her course, "Spanish and Portuguese Colonization as Depicted Through Computer Games," Rice University Professor Pat Seed has students critique several games, including *Age of Empires, Colonization,* and *Cutthroats*; showing how they embody different theories of history. There is no such thing as a neutral simulation; they all present assumptions about the way the world works.

Games can be powerful educational tools when used as a springboard for engaging in critical thought and play. However, there's no reason to fear that computer games will replace teachers or textbooks. Students need class discussions to help develop critical perspectives on gameplay, and understand where games fail to represent reality.

The game industry could win over many parents and educators who are currently suspicious of game content if they fully embraced the development of next-generation games for classroom use. Imagine a world where learning more about chemistry, history, or even Shakespeare through a game is as commonplace as learning through books or film. What if we could engage those students who stay up all night solving a level on a game to put that same energy, creativity, and imagination into mastering schoolroom concepts?

Henry Jenkins and Kurt Squire run the Games-to-Teach Project at MIT. Jenkins is the Director of the Comparative Media Studies Program; Squire is finishing his doctoral degree in Education from Indiana University. You can find more information on the program at cms.mit.edu/games/education

THE FUTURE OF REALITY TV

"capture the flag on tactical steroids."
dailygame.net

"nexagon looks to be this year's smash tv. big money. big prizes. we love it."
gamespy

"rock'em sock'em robots meets american gladiators."
cdmag

"tune in tonight... if you can stomach it."
tv net guide

Watch Nexagon Deathmatch, a gladiator arena set in the 44th Century, where convicts have squads who fight for their freedom in a completely destructible 3D environment for the entertainment of billions of viewers.

AIRING DAILY!
CHECK YOUR LOCAL LISTINGS

Pick up the home version today

TEEN
T
Violence
ESRB CONTENT RATING www.esrb.org

Strategy First

NEXAGON DEATHMATCH

WWW.NEXAGONDEATHMATCH.COM

©2003 Strategy First Inc. All rights reserved. Nexagon Deathmatch is a trademark of Strategy First Inc. All rights reserved. All other trademarks and copyrights are the properties of their respective owners.

NORTH CENTAUR

Living Lejend

D&D architect builds a new niche in tomorrow's MMOs

BY CINDY YANS

I haven't run into Gary Gygax in quite a long time, but one of my fondest memories of him was at GenCon 2000, when he was (very patiently) letting some hyper-kinetic public relations flunkies fuss over and primp his Wizard's costume as they simultaneously worried aloud that his makeshift Wizard hat was "not pointy enough." He led GenCon's costume parade that year, which marked the commercial release of the *Dungeons & Dragons* Third Edition rules, and all involved agreed that, given his pedigree, he was an "awfully good sport" about the whole ordeal.

"Given his pedigree" is actually the kind of phrase that makes Gygax a tad uncomfortable, as he'd be the first to say something like, "We're just folks." It is interesting, though, that the guy who co-invented *Dungeons & Dragons* is not all that enamored of its rules-encrusted gameplay anymore—especially as it translates to PC gaming. And that's really the point. It doesn't translate well. While he's extremely happy that *D&D* has corrupted, I mean, "enriched" the lives of many, and is pleased to see its heritage live on, he decided a number of years ago that there were "lighter" fish to fry.

> "...he found he was simply burning out on 'rules-heavy' game design...or perhaps he was just burning the candle from the other end."

"After I did *AD&D*, which was pretty much just *D&D* with more quantification, I did the *Dangerous Journeys* 'Mythus System' fantasy game, which was a highly complex, super rules-heavy, skill-based game," he says. After that, he found he was simply burning out on "rules-heavy" game design... or perhaps he was just burning the candle from the other end.

The complications of designing potential computer game properties became daunting. "While writing proposals for computer role-playing games, I said to myself, 'Holy mackerel, I've really got to simplify things considerably,'" he says. "So that's how I began working on the *Lejendary Adventure* system, which is skill-bundle based, and 'Rules Light.'" In other words, character class features and abilities are no longer central to gameplay. You can build any type of character, choose an "Order" if you want to snuggle into a cozy skill-bundle, or if you don't, you can select among all of the Abilities. Oh sure, there are rules... quite a number of them. From the *Lejendary Adventure* Quick Start Guide: "Combat is broken into segments of time called Activity Blocks (AB). One AB is 12 seconds long. ABs are further segmented into four 3-second segments called Counts (ABCs). The time costs for many Powers are out of sync with ABs and ABCs. Since each ABC is comprised of 3 seconds, a -3 initiative penalty is applied for every second into the ABC the activation takes. ...For example, A Very Good Activation has a time cost of 7 seconds, which amounts to a -6 Initiative penalty in the second ABC following its initiation (7 seconds = 2 ABC+1 sec.)."

Phew! Gotta love that "Rules Light" stuff.

To be fair, though, the overall ruleset *is* a lot easier to digest than the *D&D* 1st through 3.5 Edition rules, which will make it easier for... you guessed it, *Lejendary Adventure Online.* Whether Gygax jumped onto the massively multiplayer bandwagon or carefully tiptoed onto it, and whether the market will be able to bear all of the upcoming MMOs—*D&D Online* notwithstanding—is anybody's guess. Gygax is cautiously confident. "We are coming out in '04, which is better than '05 [when *D&D Online* is likely to be released], and closed beta isn't going to start until sometime late this year. Dutch developer Dreams Interactive is going to do it." So how did a fellow from the Midwest hook up with a development team in The Netherlands? "*D&D* gamers... they're everywhere," he states—no hyperbole implied or inferred.

Gygax believes that gameplay in *LA Online* will be quite different from what we see in *EverQuest*, et al., where combat is often boring and repetitive. "In *LA*, combat is very quick and deadly, and I don't know, but... Well, players are always saying, 'Hey... you know, you can get killed real quickly this way.' And I say [he laughs wickedly], '*OH* yes... oh yeah...'" However, when asked whether RPG gamers would balk at too much "twitch" combat, he said, "I'll scream if they try to put that in."

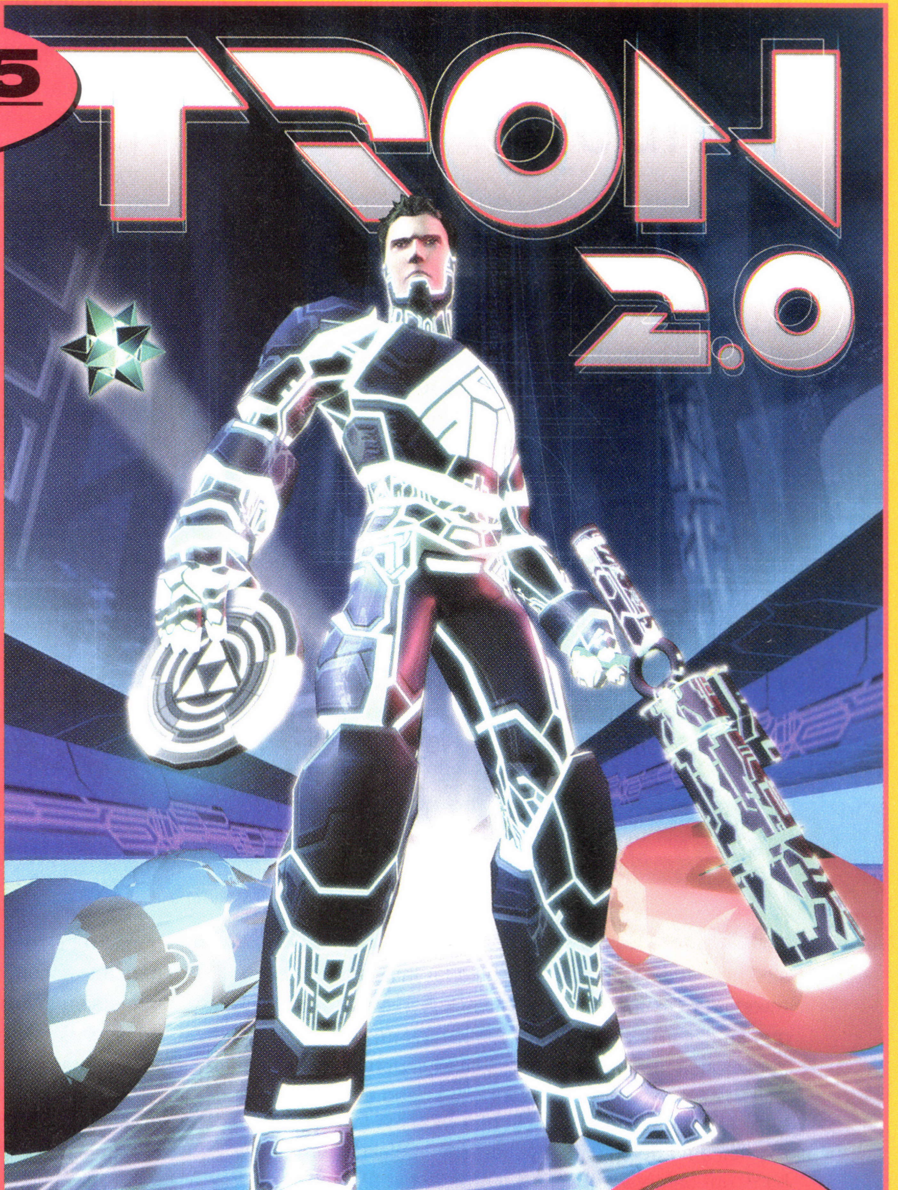
Whether or not I'm being naive, I think it would be a disservice to Gygax to insinuate in any way that he simply created *LA* to extend the long-term commercial viability of his products in the upcoming flood of MMOs. As cynical as I am, I believe that this is one person who really is "his own man." And he can wear his floppy hat anywhere he wants.

www.chipsbits.com

LESS COST, MORE FUN.

$44.95

Monolith's TRON 2.0 is the present-day sequel to the 1982 cult film classic that was a landmark of computerized graphical ingenuity. TRON 2.0, is a story-driven, first-person action game that propels the player into an alternate universe inside a computer. As Jet Bradley (son of the original film's hero Alan Bradley) you will combat digital opponents using guns, rods, grenades, missiles, and the iconic TRON disc. Combining the best of the genre with a truly innovative look and breakthrough game play, TRON 2.0 delivers an adventure unlike any other.



TRON 2.0 — Get it at CHIPS & BITS

PO Box 234 • Dept. 11410 • 2520 VT Rte. 100N • Rochester, VT 05767
INT'L 802.767.3033 • FAX 802.767.3382 • US 800.699.GAME (4263)

Source Code 11419

view from the middle

Death of a Fanboy

Journeying into the Looking Glass

BY KEN LEVINE

Like usual, it was something like two in the morning. I was dead tired and stuck in Doug Church's shadowy cave of an office. He was on the phone, talking to....well, someone. His phone conversations were nearly context-free. He might have been talking to his girlfriend, the pizza delivery guy, or perhaps, General Augusto Pinochet. While never secretive, he was practically opaque. Who was he talking to? Got me. How did he like working at Looking Glass? Who knows? What made him wake up one morning and say, "You know what? I think I'm going to spearhead the creation of fully 3D immersive world simulations?" I couldn't say.

Doug took his time when it came to pretty much everything. Most days, he wouldn't even show up until midnight. When he did arrive, he generally had the appearance of a Bataan death march re-enactor: dangerously thin, profound bags under his eyes, tousled hair, and a t-shirt that seemed far into the process of reverting to its more basic elements. A frequent world traveler and an occasional climber of exotic mountains, he had the appearance of a guy who hadn't left his dorm room in a week.

> *"Why Looking Glass had hired me, I couldn't really say."*

I was a newcomer to Looking Glass and the industry, perhaps two months off the train that took me from my "What the hell am I doing with my life?" life in New York. I was a hardcore gamer with a short tenure in the film industry. Why Looking Glass had hired me, I couldn't really say. It felt something like being taken off your couch in the middle of a game of *Madden* and dropped onto the offensive line of a Giants-Raiders game.

My first week was simultaneously exhilarating and deeply depressing. It was clear that no one really knew that I had been hired. I was assigned to no project and had no desk, no computer, no phone, and no boss. On my third day, frustrated by the utter chaos that was Looking Glass in 1995, I walked out of the office in the middle of the day and went to the movies. A double feature, actually. When I returned, I presumed nobody would have noticed my absence.

"Ken." It was Walter, the kindly, hippie-ish Creative Director who had hired me. With a gray ponytail and a well-groomed white beard, he was the human equivalent of cotton candy fresh from the carnival stand: warm and sweet, with so strong a desire to avoid offense that it sometimes rendered him incapable of forming a complete sentence. "I was looking for you. Doug wants to talk to you."

Doug? Surely, he couldn't mean *the* Doug?

Within a week after coaxing *Ultima Underworld* to run on my 386, I had become a Doug Church fan. Mind you, game developers didn't have fans in 1992, but *Underworld* was a mind-altering experience, a first glimpse into the notion of virtual existence, of actually immersing yourself into the shoes of another. Before *Underworld*, games were something you played. *Underworld* was something you did, something you enacted.

"So," Doug started, hesitant, pensive, perhaps worried about saying something stupid to someone whose closest brush with game development before this week had been trying to get enough high memory to run *Strike Commander*. "We're going to do this... ummm, game...."

"What kind of game?" I asked. *Advantage: Levine!*

"Hmmm," Doug said, seemingly confounded by the question. "Well, Paul [Neurath, co-founder of Looking Glass and all around super-smart guy] has this idea that we should do another role-playing game, but with more action. An action-RPG. How's that for vague-o-riffic?"

"Vague-o-riffic?" Did the almighty creator of *Ultima Underworld* and *System Shock* just say "Vague-o-riffic?" These were the hallowed halls of Looking Glass! Surely there were time-honored traditions of developing these masterful video games. Undoubtedly, there were tomes of gaming wisdom stacked neatly on shelves, master classes on immersion and interface design, perhaps even secret decoder rings?

"Ummm..." I started. "What kind of action-RPG?"

Doug paused to read an incoming e-mail. He laughed mysteriously, typed something I could not see, and hit "send." Probably just a little pearl of wisdom to Lord British, or perhaps a lively *bon mot* to Sid Meier. Doug was one of those guys who knew all of those guys. He looked around at the walls of unopened software that buttressed his shadowy lair. A virgin copy of *X-COM* tilted precariously off one shelf, perhaps feeling unloved like one of the sad refugees from the island of lost toys, looking to make a break for it.

He peeled an orange and then put it down, with no clear plan to actually eat it. "We should probably figure that out."

To be continued....

Ken Levine is the General Manager and Creative Director of Irrational Games.

Don't just play the game. Get into it.

Don't let a sluggish Internet connection or annoying pop-up ads hold you back—be unbeatable with EarthLink.® We give you a fast, reliable connection to keep you in the game and powerful tools to help you take charge online. Like our NEW spamBlocker tool that zaps up to 100% of unwanted email, an exclusive Pop-Up Blocker℠ tool that destroys virtually all of those pesky pop-up ads, and award-winning, 24/7 customer support. (Hey, we play to win, too.) Want more? Go with EarthLink High Speed and you'll also get a lightning-fast, lag-kill-busting connection, plus a static IP option for instant recognition by your opponents.

NEW! spamBlocker

POP-UP BLOCKER™

Sign up today for EarthLink Dial-Up Internet service and get your first 1000 hours FREE*

EarthLink High Speed Call today for a special offer**

Look for our software on the CD with this magazine.

Or call 1.888.204.4597 and mention code 1017530.

Why Wait? Move to EarthLink.™

* Offer good for a limited time. Subject to change. This offer is good for new subscribers only. This offer cannot be redeemed in conjunction with any other offer. This offer is for dial-up Internet access only. Valid with major credit card orders only. 1,000-hour offer must be used within the first 45 days of subscription. Access fees, taxes, and other fees and restrictions may apply.

** Offer for a limited time only and subject to change. Service not available in all areas. Some restrictions apply. Offer available to new EarthLink High Speed subscribers only. May not be used in conjunction with any other offer. Does not include shipping and handling charges. Certain taxes and other fees may apply.

© 2003 EarthLink, Inc. EarthLink and the EarthLink logo are registered trademarks of EarthLink, Inc. Trademarks are property of their respective owners. All rights reserved.

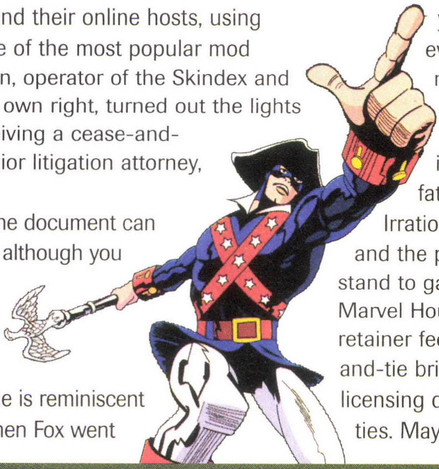
out of the box

Marvel Smash!

Who needs the Hulk when you've got high-priced lawyers?

BY BRETT TODD

The home of the superhero has been taken over by the supervillain. Marvel Comics has done a Doctor Doom on *Freedom Force* skin creators and their online hosts, using legal muscle to shut down one of the most popular mod sites on the web. Jared Benson, operator of the Skindex and a popular skin designer in his own right, turned out the lights in June immediately after receiving a cease-and-desist letter from Marvel's senior litigation attorney, Eli Baird.



Anyone who wants to read the document can find it online in a dozen places, although you should save yourself the Googling and just imagine really harsh legalese coming from lawyers more misguided than Ally McBeal. The nasty tone is reminiscent of that seen a few years ago when Fox went after *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* fan sites, and Paramount harassed anyone who posted a Photoshop-altered image of Spock. It ups the ante even further, by demanding that the indentities of all skin creators and downloaders be revealed, presumably for further, RIAA-style action. Thank you, Lars Ulrich.

> "...the Avengers will have to sell the mansion and boot Jarvis to the curb if Joe from Idaho is allowed to download a skin of Captain America."

Perhaps I was a fool to believe that the Gestapo lawyer fetish had gone away, especially when we've got Senator Orrin Hatch openly musing about destroying personal computers for out-of-bounds file trading, but this action truly surprised me. Hasn't everyone realized that this sort of thing is fan worship at its finest? The sort of activity that strengthens trademarks? Even when you take into account Marvel's Hollywood homeruns, and its deal with Vivendi Universal Games to produce a massively-multiplayer game using the company's long-underwear legends, a preemptive strike of this kind is foolish, maybe even somewhat suicidal.

For starters, Marvel movie rights have been mostly sold. Maybe there's big cash in the offing for another try at *Howard the Duck*, but if so, I haven't heard about it. More to the point, the official Marvel game isn't available now and isn't going to be available for at least another year—more likely two. Cutting the Electronic Arts-published *Freedom Force* off at the knees now might make fanboys drool for the real thing, but it's more apt to make them angry over the wait. Also, what would rev people up for a superhero game featuring the likes of Spidey and the Hulk? A thriving and enthusiastic fan base making and trading skins of these characters, or a complete vacuum?

And Marvel's aimed its Harvard-law-school-Hulks at the wrong target. Perhaps that's not a surprise, considering this is the same company that just released a 25-cent Hulk movie promo comic with a Hulkless story—fans of Bill Bixby take note—you can practically hear the piano music as you turn the pages—although this move seems even dumber. Going after modders and their fans makes zero sense because neither group is attempting to make a profit here. If anything, they're expending their time and money broadening Marvel's appeal. The only people who might be fattening their bank accounts with these mods are Irrational Games and Electronic Arts. Both the developer and the publisher of *Freedom Force* are the only ones who stand to gain from this illicit usage of characters from the Marvel House of Ideas. If the publisher wants to put its retainer fees to good purpose, it might want to send the suit-and-tie brigade after those companies. Perhaps some kind of licensing deal could be worked out for the benefit of all parties. Maybe Marvel could be persuaded to back off as part of a publishing deal involving new games, or expansions to *Freedom Force* featuring all the stars from the Marvel Universe. That way, everybody wins, even Vivendi Universal, because the demand for Marvel characters would be goosed while it preps its game for launch.

Of course, that assertion assumes that somebody is losing now. But can anyone back that up? Everybody seems to be winning already. Marvel is receiving a lot of great publicity despite Chicken Little squawking that the Avengers will have to sell the mansion and boot Jarvis to the curb if Joe from Idaho is allowed to download a skin of Captain America. Vivendi Universal is gaining the same benefits. On the other side of the coin, Irrational and EA get to take advantage of a great side-benefit to a great game, and fans can enjoy classic characters from Ant-Man to Professor X, right now.

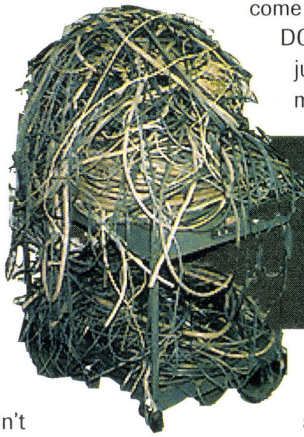
Sober second thought and common sense would have been enough to convince Marvel that releasing the lawyers wasn't the best option in this case. Leaving well enough alone would have served everybody just fine. But that's not what lawyers do. Nor is that what Marvel does best these days, cineplex success notwithstanding.

The Wires, They're Everywhere!

Behind my PC you can find the rat's nest of tomorrow, today

BY JASON CROSS

Last week my trusty old webcam, which had sat in my closet for over a year before I first hooked it up, fell off its perch atop my monitor and behind my computer desk. "That's it," I thought. "Time to buy a new webcam." I mean, I wasn't going to go back there after it. The four inches between the back of my computer desk and the wall is a space fit for neither man nor beast. It's a dizzying jumble of wires that looks like a big vat of spaghetti. It's like some kind of cyber Chef Boyardee nightmare. There are two power strips, fully loaded, and I can't even tell which plug belongs to what.



Because the mess of wires looks something like a Brillo pad under a microscope, it's impossible to clean back there. You know those annoyingly small PC screws? Every now and then one of them will make its way to the edge of my desk and fall back there. I have no idea where they come from—I didn't put these screws on my desk in the first place—but there are now at least a dozen lying unreachable on the floor behind it. I sometimes spy a small fragment of potato chip. I thought a small animal got tangled up in there, but it turns out that it's just enough dust to choke one. If you snooped around with a flashlight, you would eventually discover among this metric ton of wiring: several pens, scraps of paper with notes for old games, a few CD-Rs with god-knows-what burned on them, candy wrappers, cables that aren't even plugged into anything, and the skeletal remains of Tom Chick, whose column is actually produced by a large group of well-trained, beret-wearing monkeys with typewriters. And a webcam.

It doesn't have to be like this. It would only take the slightest modicum of innovation to get rid of the PC cabling nightmare. About two-thirds of the wires coming out the back of my PC are totally redundant; they're going to the same place as other wires. Why does my monitor need both a video and power cable? I've more than enough power going into my PC. Can't one wire supply both power and signal? There's another USB cable going from the back of my PC to my new webcam, which of course is also on my monitor where any sensible person would put it. And a joystick plug, the USB connector for my SideWinder Game Voice (which also had both headphone and microphone cables going to it), and my mouse and keyboard, which sit mere inches from my monitor. All going to essentially the same place.

> "It would only take the slightest modicum of innovation to get rid of the PC cabling nightmare."

My solution is simple. The CMCS (Cross Monitor Cabling Specification) is one big fat cable going from the back of your PC to your monitor. The cable would split about a foot from the PC side because we can't expect enough power to come out the back of your video card, we need to draw DC power from the back of the power supply. But it's just one big cable heading up to the back of your monitor base (why don't monitor cables plug into the base?). This one cable carries a DVI monitor signal, stereo audio out and stereo microphone in, and several channels of high-speed USB. My monitor could then have a built-in mic that auto-disables when I plug in an external one. It would have four powered USB ports on the right-side edge that I could quickly plug a gamepad or joystick into, three or four USB ports down on the front of the base to plug a keyboard and mouse into, and a row of USB ports on the back for webcams and stuff. Now I have one big cord instead of a dozen.

But there are plenty of other boneheaded cabling problems. Only a computer geek could love the ridiculous design of monitor plugs, with those two idiotic thumbscrews on the sides that seem specifically designed to catch on other cables. Why didn't we change to clips back in 1990? And I don't mean clips like on Ethernet and phone jacks, which also double as cord-grabbing hooks. The clips they use on backpack straps would be a great design for my new CMCS monitor plug. I still can't figure out why the power plugs that ship with every PC component don't have a label on the wall end that says "speakers," "monitor," or "scanner," so I can tell what the heck I'm unplugging.

If all of this had been implemented years ago, it might have saved poor Tom Chick's life. I suppose for now I just have to deal with the fact that I'm out $80 for a new Logitech Quickcam 4000, which, by the way, kicks ass.

three finger salute

My Life as a Wookiee

"You have failed to remove the Beru Stew."

BY TOM CHICK

Second only to, "you mean go on a date with you?" the eight most humiliating words in the English language are: "you have been incapacitated by a Corellian butterfly." So when *Star Wars: Galaxies* said that to me, I decided the best course of action was to never again venture into the countryside. That's when my Wookiee became a Maitre d'.

> "Have some respect. A lot of my people died for the Rebellion. It's not our fault we look like cartoon dogs."

Actually, he's not a Maitre d' yet. He's up to Novice Busboy. He's earning Cantina Service Experience to level up from Dish Washing. I work at the cantina in Kor Vella where there's no danger of incapacitation by butterfly.

My friend Trevor is a Master Undergarment Maker. He's hoping to work his way up to crafting power converters and eventually batteries for lightsabers. He was incapacitated by a diseased vrelt. He insists his humiliation was greater.

"At least the butterfly that took you out wasn't sick. The thing that got me wasn't even in good health."

Trevor and I chat in the back room of the cantina while I'm washing dishes, and he's sitting on the floor, tatting Mandalorian lace to make bras for Twi'lek head tentacles. I'm trying to get some dried Beru Stew out of the bottom of a Jaar pot. I have the Scrub command bound to F9.

"Yeah," I say, "but your thing was more like a rat. A womprat or something. That's very *Star Wars*." I hit F9.

"At least you don't look like Huckleberry Hound," Trevor says. Trevor's a Bothan.

"You don't look like Huckleberry Hound," I reassure him. "Huckleberry Hound was more of a teal color." *Galaxies* tells me: "You have failed to remove the Beru Stew." I hit F9.

"That's easy for you to say, you're a wookiee. I should have been a wookiee."

"You're a darker shade of blue than Huckleberry Hound. Your ears are smaller. But you do kind of look like a turquoise Pink Panther."

"Have some respect. A lot of my people died for the Rebellion. It's not our fault we look like cartoon dogs."

You have failed to remove the Beru Stew. F9.

I'm logging on today not really because I want to, but because I'm paying $15 a month. I have plenty of other games that are free, in the sense that I don't have to pay for them after I buy them. There's no pressing need to play those. They'll wait. But this is like cable. If I have it and I'm not using it, I feel guilty. So I watch reruns of *Night Court*, because it's my duty to get my money's worth. As a fiscally responsible person, I'm obligated.

But I tell you, sometimes it's a grind. Yesterday I got Deneelian Fizz Pudding on my Lekku Wrap, and I had to get a Darth Maul dude to dry clean it. He didn't charge me any money, but because it's a player driven economy, his price was that I follow him around crowded areas for a half hour, calling him "sir" in those big chat bubbles that float over our heads.

I almost have enough points for Table Wiping, which will mean I can bus tables as soon as I save enough money to pay for the training. Maybe I can auction off my scrub brush, which I made from Vynock whiskers and an Acodi stalk.

You have failed to remove the Beru Stew. F9.

I'm hoping this is one of the ways you can unlock a Jedi character. Truth be told, I'm not that psyched about being a Maitre d'. I really want to be a Jedi. I want to be a Jedi so bad that I quit smoking in real life so I could afford *Galaxies* without canceling my *Planetside*, *Dark Age of Camelot*, and *EverQuest* accounts.

And you know what keeps me going? Every time I boot up the game, there's a promise right underneath that ESRB rating: "Game experience may change during online play." Gosh, I hope so. Every time I see that, I know exactly how Luke Skywalker felt on the moisture farm, looking at the twin setting suns of Tattooine, dreaming about something greater out there. LucasArts has really captured that part of *Star Wars*. I can't wait till they add in the other parts.

You have failed to remove the Beru Stew.

Computer Games Magazine (ISSN 0955-4424) is published monthly by Strategy Plus, Inc. Subscription rate is $19.97 for a one year subscription, $31.97 Canada. Periodical postage paid at Richmond, VT 05477 and additional mailing offices. **Produced in U.S.A.**
Postmaster: Send address changes to Computer Games, PO Box 1965, Marion, OH 43306.

STAR TREK®
ELITE FORCE II

ENGAGE IN EPIC CONFLICT against a horde of alien invaders and other foes in the single player campaign. Deathmatch-style Multiplayer gameplay modes include Holomatch, Capture the Flag, Elimination, Action Hero and many more.

LEAD YOUR TEAM INTO BATTLE across numerous environments including: planet-side ruins, space stations, volcanic planets, alien colonies, treacherous swamps and other exotic locales.

FIRE AT WILL with weapons of devastating firepower including the Gatling Gun, Sniper Rifle and the deadly Quantum Burst. Irradiate your enemies with the experimental Radiation Disruptor.

For PC CD-ROM and Macintosh®

Visit www.st-ef2.com for more information

TEEN
T
CONTENT RATED BY ESRB

Blood and Gore
Violence

Paramount
A VIACOM COMPANY

STARTREK.COM

ASPYR™

ritual ENTERTAINMENT

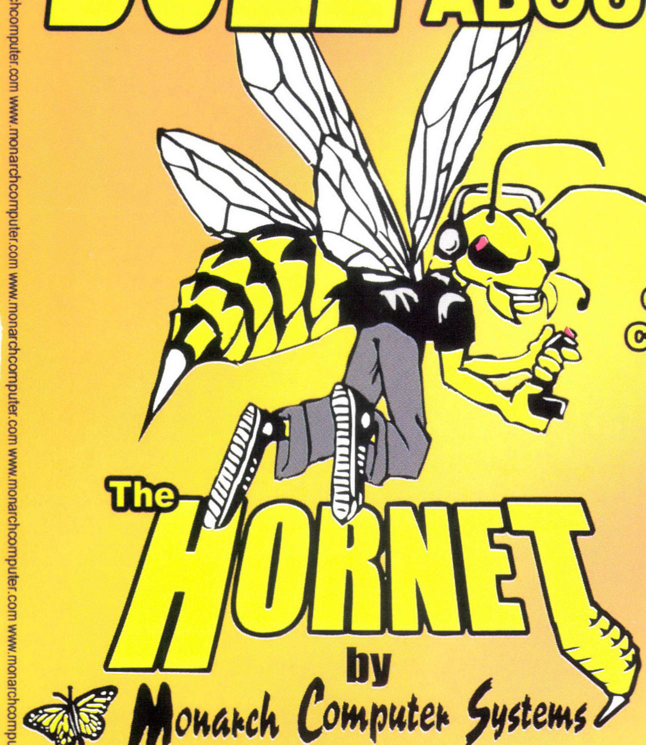
ACTIVISION®

TM, ®, & © 2003 Paramount Pictures. All rights reserved. Star Trek and related marks are trademarks of Paramount Pictures. This product contains software technology licensed from Id Software, Inc. Id Technology © 1999-2003 Id Software, Inc. Game code © 2003 Activision, Inc. and its affiliates. All rights reserved. Published and distributed by Activision Publishing, Inc. Activision is a registered trademark of Activision, Inc. and its affiliates. Developed by Ritual Entertainment. Mac and Macintosh are trademarks of Apple, Inc. The ratings icon is a registered trademark of the Interactive Digital Software Association. All other trademarks and trade names are the properties of their respective owners.

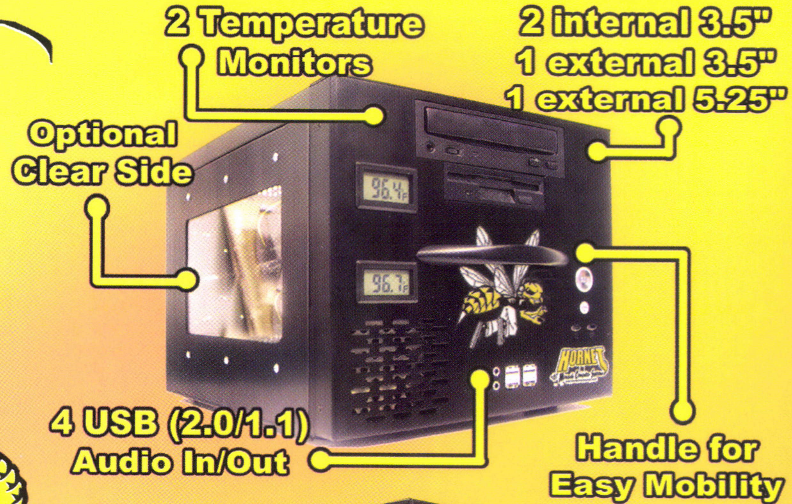
activision.com

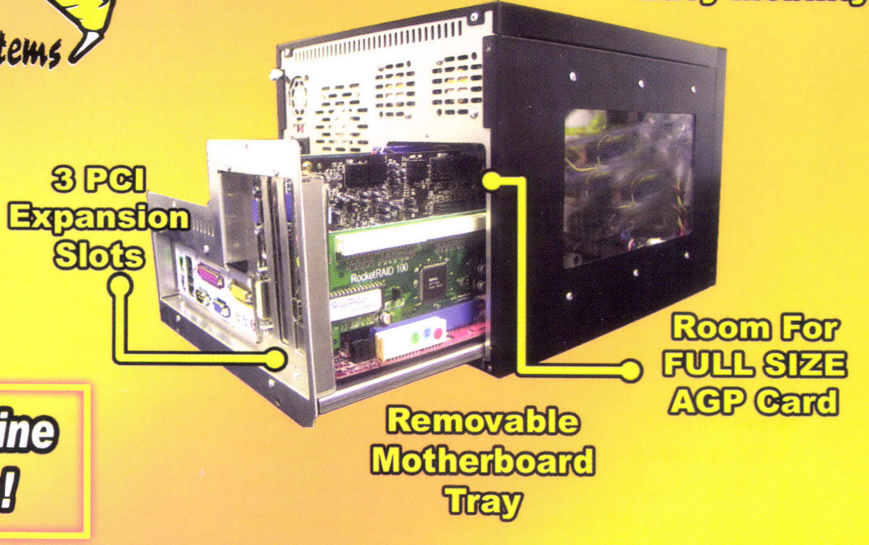
COME SEE WHAT THE BUZZ IS ALL ABOUT...

Powerful enough for the serious PC gamer, small enough to carry with you.


The
HORNET
by
Monarch Computer Systems

www.monarchcomputer.com


2 Temperature Monitors
2 internal 3.5"
1 external 3.5"
1 external 5.25"
Optional Clear Side
4 USB (2.0/1.1)
Audio In/Out
Handle for Easy Mobility


3 PCI Expansion Slots
Room For FULL SIZE AGP Card
Removable Motherboard Tray

The Hornet with Intel® Pentium® 4 Processor with HT Technology is designed for the serious multitasker

Get Quick Quotes Online on Custom Systems!

Visit ***www.monarchcomputer.com*** or call
1-8MONARCHPC or 1-800-611-0875
for specs and configuration options.
Lease financing available.

Rated one of America's Top 10 Places to Buy by ResellerRatings.com

Platinum Plus Platinum Gold

> *"If the Discovery Channel created a show called Monster PCs and devoted an episode to contestants building the hottest, meanest looking SFF boxes they could, the winning team might have unveiled something very much like Monarch's Hornet. It's not cute or even quiet. But this beast stings the competition into submission..."*
>
> ***William Van Winkle***
> ***CPU Magazine***

Intel, Intel Inside, and Pentium are registered trademarks of Intel Corporation or its subsidiaries in the United States and other Countries. All other brands and product names are trademarks or registered trademarks of their respective companies

www.monarchcomputer.com www.monarchcomputer.com www.monarchcomputer.com www.monarchcomputer.com www.monarchcomputer.com www.monarchcomputer.com www.monarchcomputer.com www.monarchcomputer.com